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THE NEW YORKER

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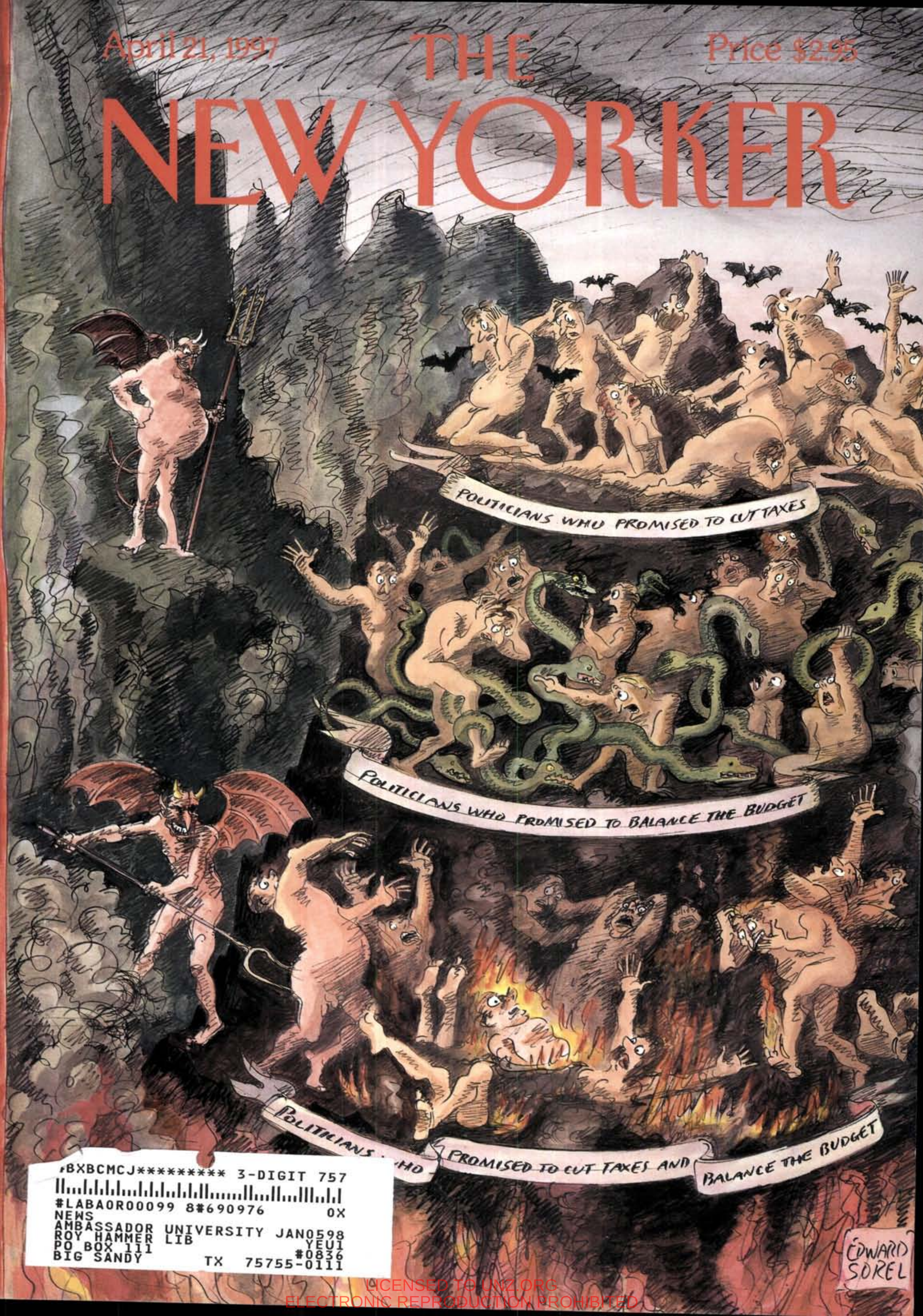

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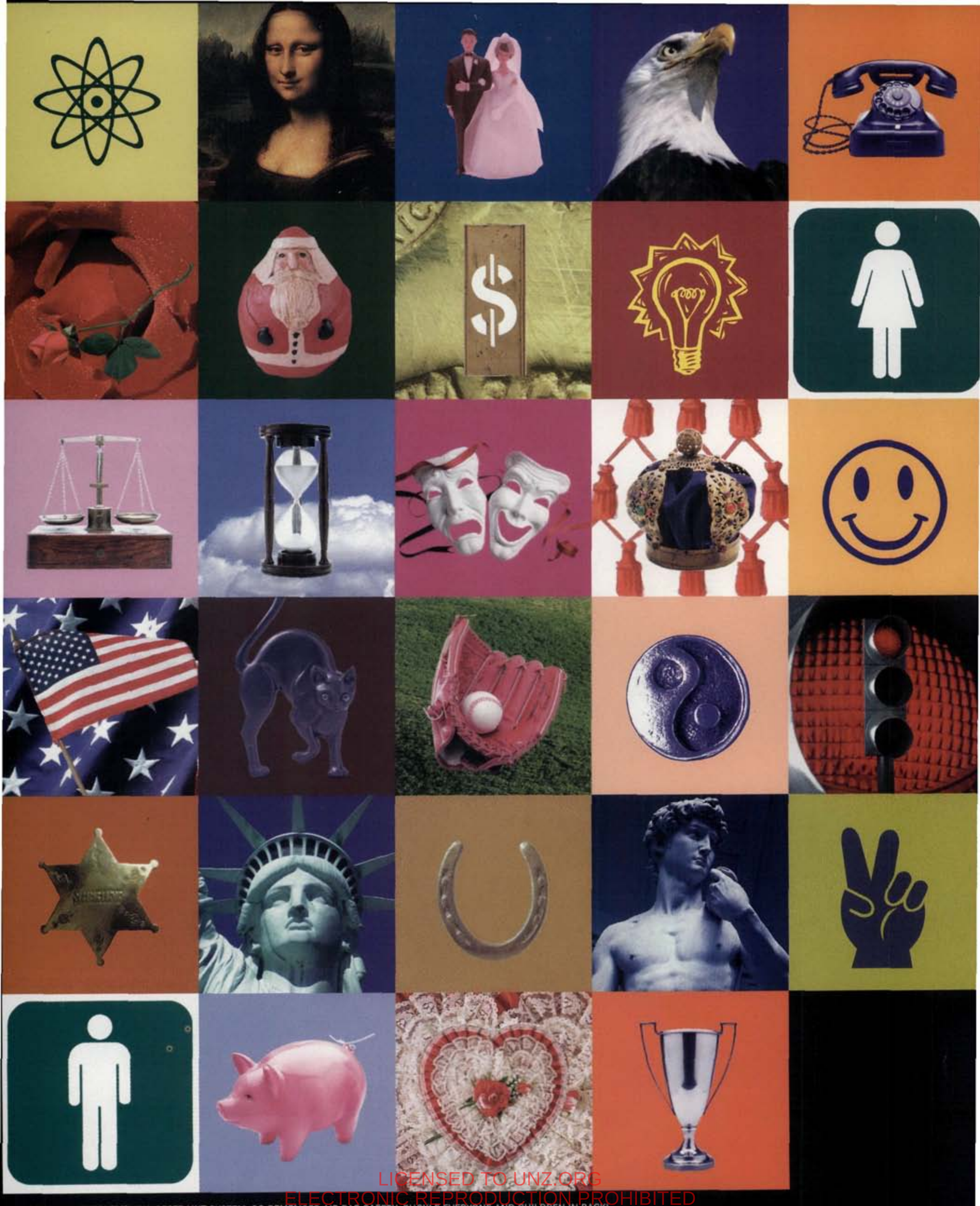

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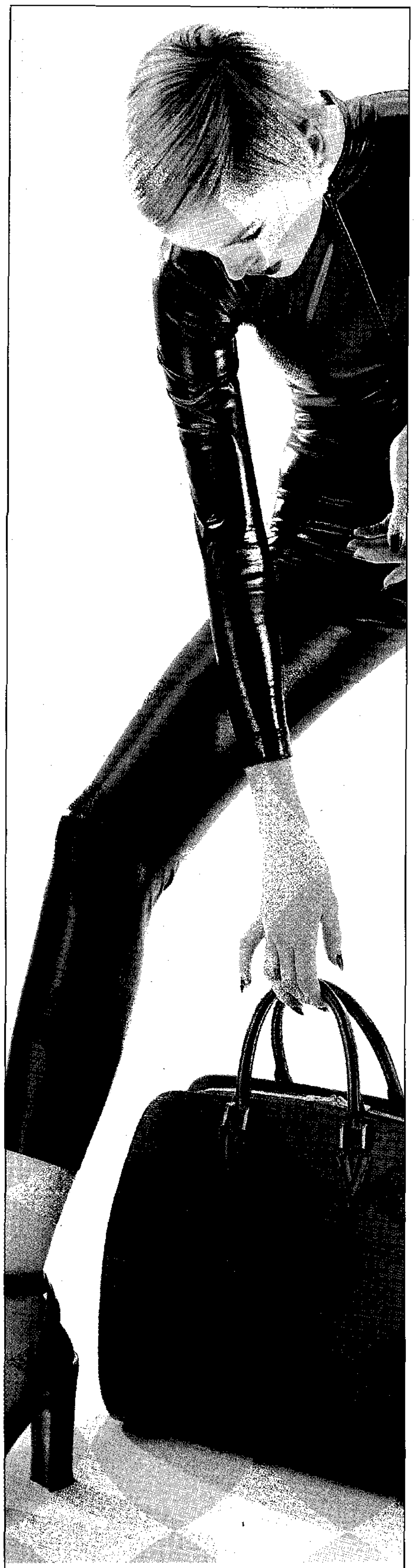

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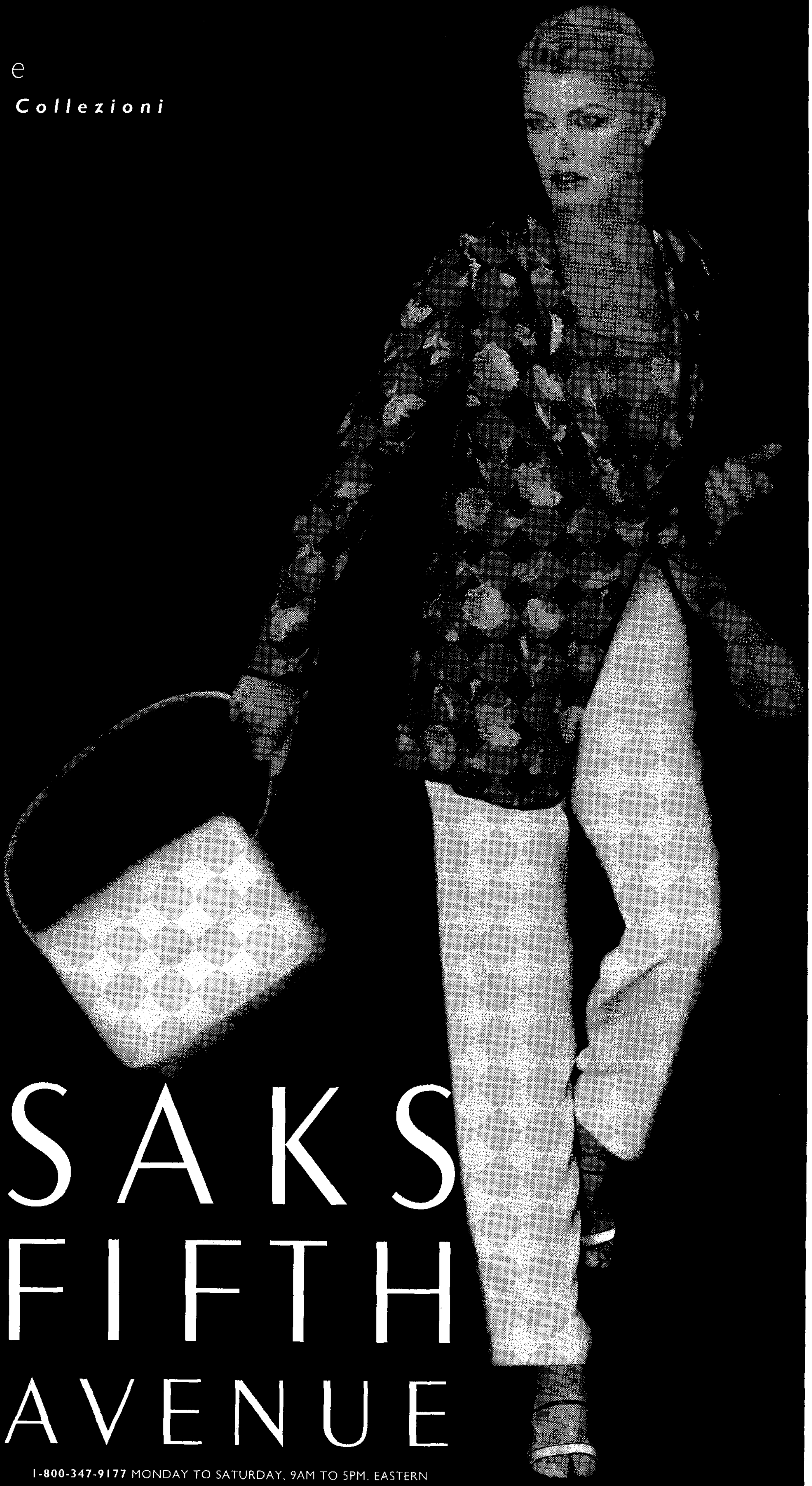
Defining Style

Giorgio Armani Le Collezioni



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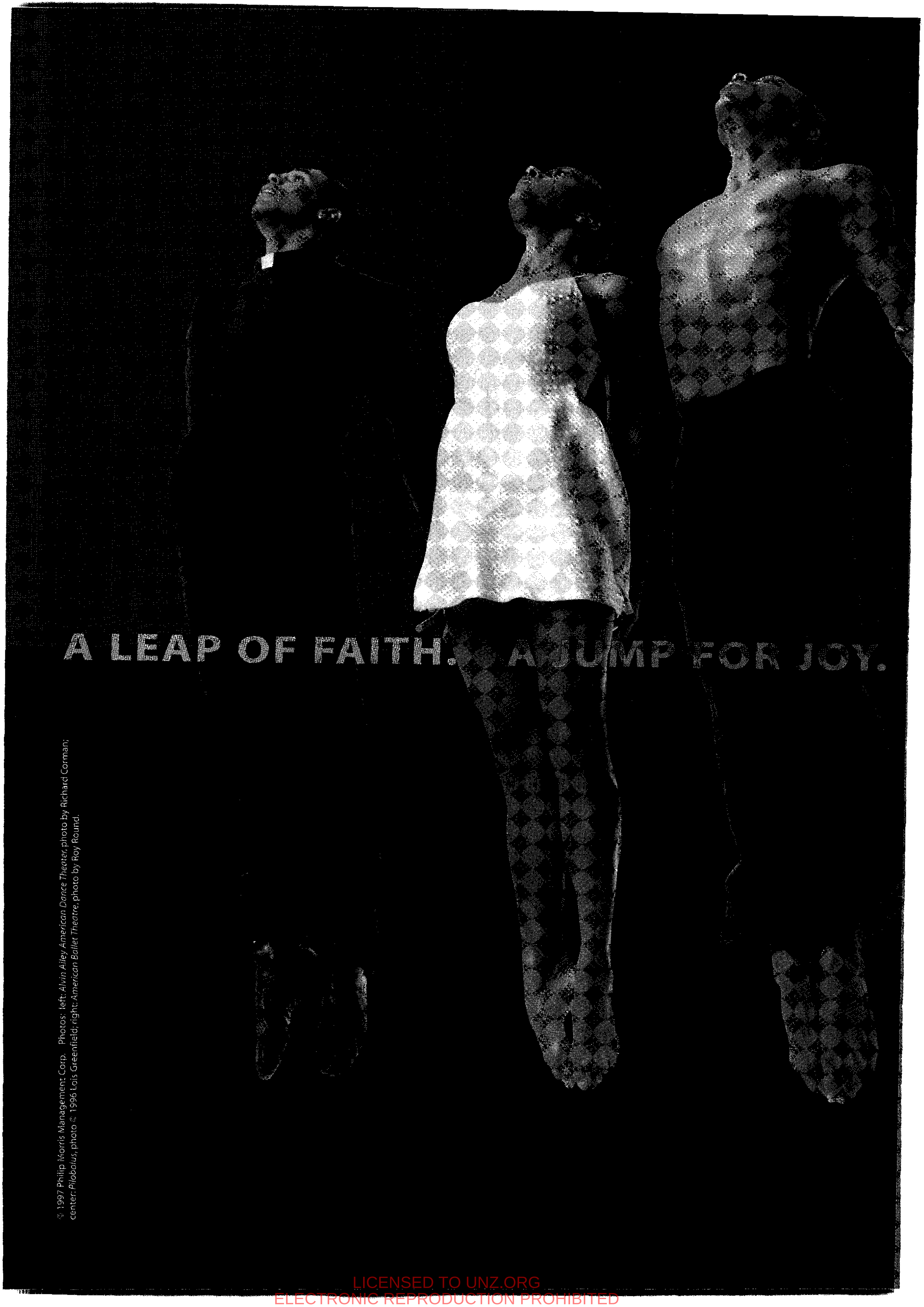
A LEAP OF FAITH. A JUMP FOR JOY.

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COMMENT

GIMME

Nailing the myth of the overpaid C.E.O.

As even the most cursory reader of the business pages knows, America's economy is in peril. The warning signs are as chilling as they are obvious: last month, workers' average hourly wages shot up an alarming five cents—a full nickel—to twelve dollars and fifteen cents. Over the last year, wages rose a vertiginous four per cent, the highest twelve-month increase since 1990. Because prices have been going up at an annual rate of around three per cent, the inexorable consequence is that, for the first time in more than two decades, many workers are enjoying gains in their purchasing power. Luckily, the Federal Reserve Board is alert to the danger. Having raised short-term interest rates by a quarter of a percentage point last month, the Fed is likely to raise them again next month. By making borrowing more expensive, and thereby slowing down the economy, the central bank's chairman, Alan Greenspan, hopes to contain the inflationary menace of higher wages.

Clearly, Mr. Greenspan had to do something. If he had sat on his hands much longer, the notion might have taken hold that workers ought to get a raise simply because their firms are making record profits. This is a dangerous idea, possibly of foreign origin. Wherever it comes from, though, one can at least be sure that it has nothing to do with the behavior of the corporate statesmen who have engineered our country's economic renaissance.

In 1996, Jack Welch, a.k.a. Neutron Jack, the chairman of General Electric and perhaps the most admired executive in America, pulled down $21.4 million in salary and performance bonuses—a trifling four-hundred-per-cent increase over the previous year. Many of his fellow-C.E.O.s displayed similar selflessness, albeit on a somewhat less heroic scale. At Heinz, for instance, Tony O'Reilly saw his salary and bonuses rise by only forty-five per cent. Anheuser-Busch's chairman, August Busch III, contented himself with a nominal pay hike of fifty-one per cent. Chugalug!

On Wall Street, where some of the most vocal crusaders against inflation dwell, the wage restraint was equally notable. Merrill Lynch gave its chairman, Daniel Tully, a raise of forty per cent. Paine Webber held its top dog, Donald Marron, to an increase of seventy-seven per cent, and Bear Stearns gave James Cayne a raise of just a hundred and twenty-eight per cent. But the prize for counter-inflationary zeal went to Salomon

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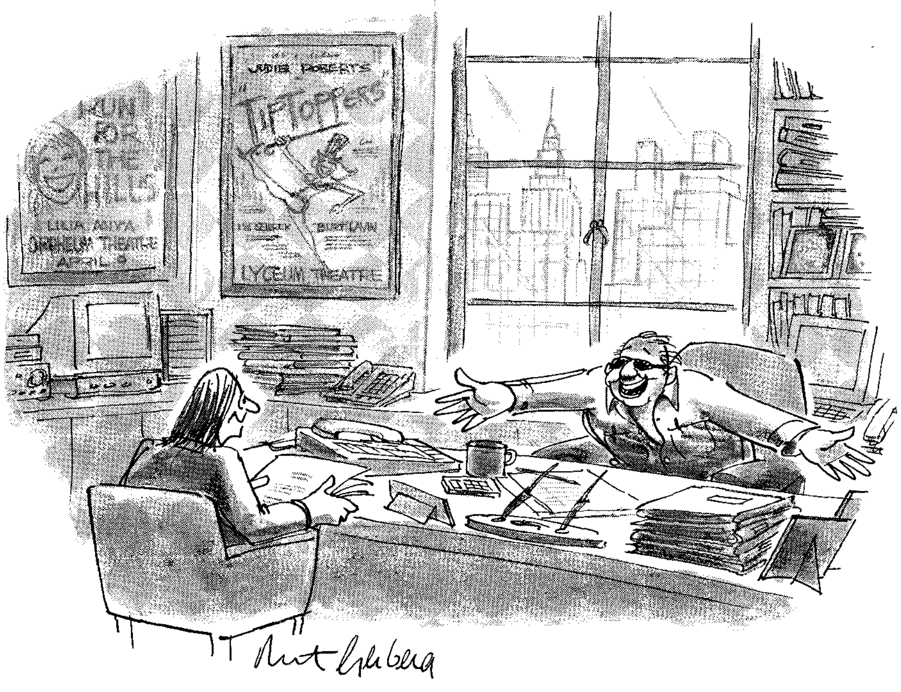
Brothers, which paid its chief executive, Deryck Maughan, $11.5 million, an uptick of about a thousand per cent. Nor have companies in the provinces hesitated to do their part. In St. Paul, Minnesota, for example, the Green Tree Financial Corporation, a fast-growing company that specializes in providing high-interest loans to low-income retirees, paid its C.E.O., Lawrence M. Coss, $102.4 million in salary and bonus—only $36.9 million more than what he took home in 1995.

Admittedly, these figures don't include the value of stock options granted to senior executives. Neutron Jack Welch, for example, received on top of that $21.4 million in salary and bonuses, options on three hundred and twenty thousand G.E. shares, which the firm valued at a minimum of eighteen million dollars. Mr. Coss got two million options, worth at least thirty-eight million dollars, to put his total take-home in the $140 million range. Michael Eisner, the chairman of the Walt Disney Company, recently received options on eight million Disney shares, which are worth at least $196 million.

What naïve commentators fail to realize is that while these "compensation packages" may sound a mite excessive they are the key to motivating men who determine the fate of thousands of shareholders and employees. After all, until their recent windfalls Mr. Welch owned barely four hundred and twenty-four thousand G.E. shares and 3.2 million options, while Mr. Eisner's stake in Disney was worth hardly more than a third of a billion dollars. Without plenty of shiny new stock options to keep their minds from wandering, the nation's chief executive officers could easily become slothful, pouty, and listless. And then where would the country be? So let's not hear any more carping about overpaid bosses and corporate greed.

True, Intel's Andrew Grove took home $97.6 million last year, Sanford Weill, of the Travelers Group, bagged $94.2 million, and Citicorp's John Reed netted $43.6 million. But, according to *Business Week*, when you add together salary, bonuses, and options packages the typical C.E.O. at a large company saw his pay envelope grow by just fifty-four per cent—barely eighteen times the increase necessary to keep pace with the cost of living. (All told, his paycheck was only two hundred and nine times as big as the average factory employee's.) In the end, the argument comes down to a matter of elementary economics: when a working stiff demands a pay raise, it causes inflation and threatens the nation's prosperity; when a C.E.O. gets a raise ten thousand times as large, it rewards enterprise and assures all our futures. The two phenomena, obviously, are entirely separate. Only a fool or a journalist could confuse them. —JOHN CASSIDY



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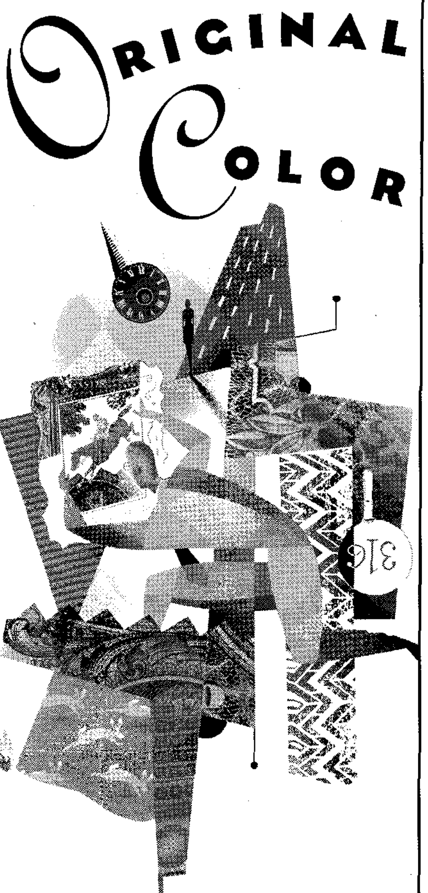

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BETTELHEIM'S LEGACY

In her article on Bruno Bettelheim (Books, March 24th) Daphne Merkin writes that Bettelheim "fought ferociously" to bring children who were once thought unreachable "out of emotional exile and back into the world," but to mothers of children with autism, like me, Bettelheim is a vile individual who made our lives and our children's far more miserable than they would otherwise have been. His insistence on the insane theory that our children were autistic because we mothers had damaged them set authentic explorations into the cause of and treatments for autism back many years, and, incidentally, brought ostracism and suffering to entire families. Merkin makes cursory reference to the pain we felt, but says that it is compensated for by all the good that Bettelheim did for the children themselves. How would one know that's true? Bettelheim prettied up everything else about himself; why not his statistics? I've personally known hundreds of parents of autistic children, and not one of them has ever said Bettelheim helped her child.

Phyllis-Terri Gold
Charter Vice-President, Autism Society of America
Fort Salonga, N.Y.

I was a teacher and therapist at Bruno Bettelheim's school for some years, and I knew and worked with at least four of the children who as adults are publicly claiming that Bettelheim brutalized them and that they were victims of inept or biased diagnoses. Although I am not and was not a diagnostician, I did read these children's case histories, which included lengthy records of treatment elsewhere (sometimes by some of the best and most expensive clinicians in the country), batteries of tests, and statements from caseworkers, psychiatrists, and social workers attesting to the children's disturbances. But who cares how sick they were? What I find delightful and surprising is how successful they are today. Not only are they professionally successful, they are all independent and tough-minded, articulate, and interested in justice. In short, their lives are a lot better than one could have predicted from their histories. The success of these children—Bettelheim's public adversaries—is a testimony to Bettelheim's methods, to the staff of the school, and to the dedication of the children to resolving their own problems.

David Hall
Hondo, N.M.

JUSTICE FOR WHOM?

Jeffrey Toobin describes many of the goals of the proposed victims'-rights amendment to the Constitution as "relatively narrow and reasonable" ("Victim Power," March 24th). Yet if judges are asked to take into consideration the pleas of victims' families when setting bail and determining sentences, such hearings will inevitably turn into evaluations of the worth of the victim and the ability of his family to be present—and eloquent—in the courtroom. As sympathetic as the victims'-rights movement is, such arbitrariness cannot be tolerated in a criminal-justice system predicated upon the notion of due process.

Ty Alper
New York City

SHAKESPEAREAN TALMUD

The two gravediggers in "Hamlet" would have no trouble understanding the argument put forth in "Talmudic Phone Tapping" (by Malcolm Gladwell, The Talk of the Town, March 24th): that the reason Al Gore did not violate the prohibition against fund-raising from government buildings was that the phone calls he made were to people outside the White House. In discussing whether Ophelia can be given a Christian burial, one gravedigger asks how it would be possible "when she wilfully seeks her own salvation?" He suggests that Christian burial is possible for anyone who drowned, since "if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself."

Arthur Daniels
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Letters should be as brief as possible, and sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. They may be edited for length and clarity.

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

All My Sons—The Roundabout Theatre Company presents a fiftieth-anniversary production of Arthur Miller's drama. In previews. (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

Bermuda Avenue Triangle—A new comedy, about two retirement-community widows who fall under the spell of a mysterious man. In previews. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

Curse of the Starving Class—The Signature Theatre Company wraps up its Sam Shepard season with his 1978 drama. Directed by James Houghton. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

The Gin Game—Charles Nelson Reilly directs Charles Durning and Julie Harris in D. L. Coburn's 1977 play. In previews through April 19. Opens April 20 at 6:30. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

The Gypsy and the Yellow Canary—Irene Worth stars in her own one-woman adaptation of Prosper Mérimée's novel "Carmen." In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

Jekyll & Hyde—Robin Phillips is the director of this musical based on Robert Louis Stevenson's tale of the two-faced physician. Book and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse; music by Frank Wildhorn. In previews. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

The Life—A new musical by Cy Coleman (music) and Ira Gasman (lyrics), set in Times Square in 1980. Michael Blakemore is the director. In previews. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

The Little Foxes—Lillian Hellman's 1939 drama about an unscrupulous Southern family of industrialists. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

London Assurance—Brian Bedford has the lead in Dion Boucicault's 1841 comedy. In previews. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

Mere Mortals and Others—Six one-act comedies by David Ives, including two new ones. In previews. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

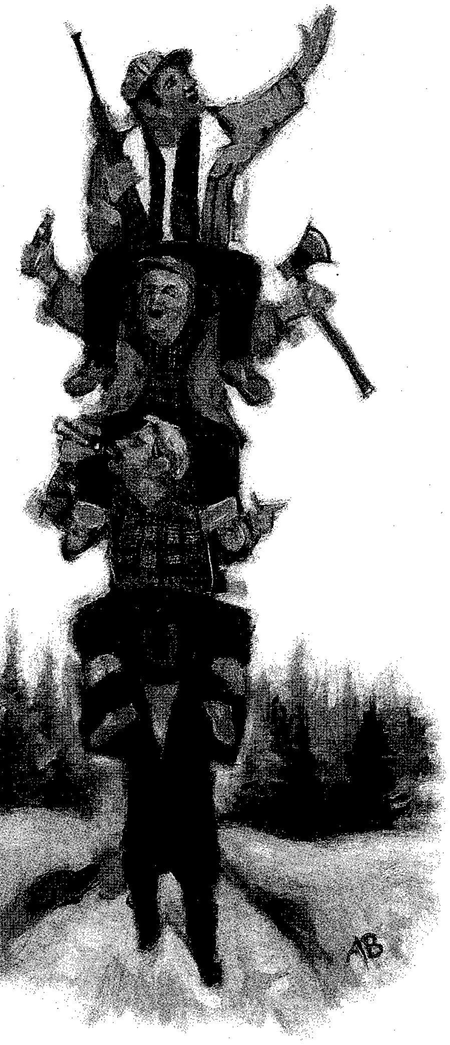
Secrets of the Celtic Heart—In his one-man show, Brian Mallon resurrects Welsh and Irish poets from the Druids to Dylan Thomas. Preview on April 16. Opens April 17 at 8. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 757-3318.)

Steel Pier—John Kander wrote the music and Fred Ebb the lyrics for this romantic musical set in Atlantic City in 1933, during a dance marathon. Scott Ellis is the director. In previews. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Sympathetic Magic—From Lanford Wilson, a new drama about a couple caught on the horns of a dilemma. Directed by Marshall W. Mason. Opens April 16 at 7. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

Titanic—A new musical about the ill-fated ocean liner, directed by Richard Jones. Peter Stone wrote the book, Maury Yeston the lyrics and music. In previews. (Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

The Young Girl and the Monsoon—Michael O'Keefe portrays a divorced father raising his twelve-year-old daughter, in a drama-comedy by James Ryan. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)



Jordan Lage, J. R. Horne, Guy Boyd, and Neil Pepe, in "The Joy of Going Somewhere Definite."

OPENED RECENTLY

An American Daughter—Wendy Wasserstein's new play stars Kate Nelligan as a professor undergoing a Senate confirmation hearing for the post of Surgeon General. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Annie—Can the powerhouse waif find another bonanza in this twentieth-anniversary revival of her Broadway musical? With eight-year-old Brittny Kissinger wearing the red fright wig, anything is possible: no one ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the New York public. Directed by Martin Charnin. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Barrymore—Christopher Plummer's rich, unmiked voice hits every note of sarcasm and self-loathing in William Luce's rambunctious script (which is as good as one-man shows get), as he perfectly captures the grief behind the old ham's gallant frivolity. A big, juicy triumph, well directed by Gene Saks. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Bunny Bunny—Playing no fewer than twenty-five bit parts, a new young actor named Alan Tudyk steals the show in this comedy by Alan Zweibel (one of the original "Saturday Night Live" writers) about his friendship with Gilda Radner, who died of cancer in 1989. Paula Cale and the excellent Bruno Kirby are likable as the leads, but Zweibel the author comes off, on occasion, as less than generous, giving Zweibel the character most of the best lines and making reference to Radner's bulimia over and over. Christopher Ashley directed. David Gallo's cartoony sets are a trip and a half. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

Chicago—Walter Bobbie's bookless, setless revival of the 1975 Kander-Ebb-Fosse extravaganza of cynicism (choreographed this time around by Ann Reinking) is about a woman who gets away with murder. This razzle-dazzle concert posing as a full-dress musical may do the same. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/25/96.) (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Corn—A Ridiculous Theatrical Company revival of Charles Ludlam's musical about the country-and-Western star Lola-Lola. (Chelsea Playhouse, 125 W. 22nd St. 307-4100.)

Dealer's Choice—Yes, it's poker as a metaphor for life, again. But Patrick Marber's new play is neither hokey nor clichéd: it's a funny, insightful exploration of the relationships between a restaurateur, his son, and his employees, who play a weekly poker game together and who are among the season's most convincing characters. Strongly played—Ritchie Coster, as the chef, and Jamie Harris, as the headwaiter, are particularly vivid—and directed with an eye for emotional nuance by John Tillinger, these six manage to discover truths about themselves without ever stepping over the line into pathos or melodrama. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

A Doll's House—A version of Ibsen's play imported from the West End, which bears thrilling witness to what the playwright called the "revolution in the spirit of man." Anthony Page's scrupulous, sensitive direction catches all the music and irony in the collusion between Nora (masterfully played by Janet McTeer) and her husband, Torvald (the passionate Owen Teale). By making Torvald a full-blooded, decent, but blinkered executive and not a hectoring Victorian prig, he frees the drama from being a mere feminist tract and makes the tragedy of Torvald's unconsciousness all the more heartbreaking. (4/14/97) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

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Dream—In this train wreck of a tribute to the great lyricist Johnny Mercer, Wayne Cilento's flailing choreography drowns Mercer's uniquely sly and clever words in a sea of arms and legs, and Lesley Ann Warren's vampy writhings make you avert your eyes. Two performers get out of the mess alive: Margaret Whiting, who unfussily sings a couple of gems, and the jazz guitarist John Pizzarelli, whose playing and singing both have an easy, loping, Mercer-like charm and clarity. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Genesis—Max McClean takes the audience from the Creation through Jacob's return to Canaan, in a one-man show that he and the playwright Buzz McLaughlin have adapted from the New International Version of the Bible's first book. It's a pleasant journey, owing to McLean's mellifluous voice and his considerable abilities as a storyteller. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 997-1780.)

God's Heart—Joe Mantello is the director of a new play by Craig Lucas, about technology, loss, class divisions, and liberal guilt. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

The Green Heart—Charles Busch (book) and Rusty Magee (music and lyrics) have joined forces on this comic thriller, a musical adaptation of Jack Ritchie's short story about a broke playboy with dark designs on a rich botanist. (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde—A new play written and directed by Moisés Kaufman. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 279-4200. Closes May 4.)

The Guardsman—The Hungarian-born playwright Ferenc Molnár's 1924 comedy, about the romantic machinations of a Viennese actor and his actress wife. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802. Closes April 26.)

The Hairy Ape—A Wooster Group production of O'Neill's drama, starring Willem Dafoe, Kate Valk, and Peyton Smith. (Selwyn, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Hate Mail—Bill Corbett and Kira Obolensky's new play traces the unfolding of an epistolary love-hate relationship. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

A Huey P. Newton Story—Roger Guenveur Smith gives an outstanding performance in a one-man show that he assembled from interviews with and writings by the co-founder of the Black Panther Party. Jiggling his legs, chain-smoking, and talking ninety miles a minute, he offers a mesmerizing (and demystifying) hour and forty-five minutes. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes April 27.)

The Invisible Man and The Nightingale and Not the Lark—Two one-acts by the Irish novelist and playwright Jennifer Johnston, starring WB Brydon and Paddy Croft, respectively. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

The Joy of Going Somewhere Definite—William H. Macy directs a comedy by Quincy Long, in which three loggers take a road trip to Canada. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

The Last Night of Ballyhoo—In his new play, a romantic comedy of manners set in Atlanta (where he grew up) in 1939, Alfred Uhry stays true to a Southern sense of propriety: he takes on an unsavory topic (anti-Semitism among the Jewish upper crust) without dwelling on it long enough to offend anyone, and, like a practiced host, he shows you a good time without taxing you. Ron Lagomarsino directed. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100.)

The Last Street Play—An urban drama, written in 1977 by Richard Wesley, starring Ella Joyce. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 346-8510.)

The Last Sweet Days—Gretchen Cryer (book and lyrics) and Nancy Ford (music) have fused two of their earlier musicals in a new work, about two people who begin a romance years after being trapped together in an elevator. A York Theatre Company staging. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820. Closes May 4.)

The Little Frieda Mysteries—The deliciously sick humor that Amy and David Sedaris have displayed in their previous plays ("Stitches," "One Woman Shoe") isn't as feverishly funny in this new one, although it does provide Ms. Sedaris with an opportunity to reprise, for a few moments, one of her trademark characters, a wildly toilet-tongued toughie who, once seen (and heard), can never be forgotten. Also with Penny Boyer, Chuck Coggins, and David Rakoff. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. Closes April 19.)

Once Upon a Mattress—That modern madcap Sarah Jessica Parker shines as the princess in Gerald Gutierrez's revival of Mary Rodgers's silly, marshmallowy 1959 musical, but she deserves a vehicle that, to paraphrase Jerome Kern, is not merely lovely to look at but delightful to know. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Play On!—Twenty-three Duke Ellington songs strung out on a thread of plot from "Twelfth Night." The music is wonderful, of course, but the musical is not—it's a mutant production in which character is fiddled with to legitimize songs that were never written to illuminate character. Neither the show's book, by Cheryl L. West, nor its star, Cheryl Freeman, has much fun with the confusion of genders. Other talented performers generate a great deal of heat, but no warmth. (4/7/97) (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

The Plough and the Stars—Sean O'Casey's take on the Easter Uprising of 1916, as seen from one Dublin tenement. The characters are less finely drawn here than in some of the playwright's other works, making the tragedy less inevitable but the comedy more fun. The director, Charlotte Moore, creates some moving moments—as when the Irish Citizen Army goes off to battle and a publican (the wonderfully understated Con Horgan) marches in his bar in silent accord—and she paces O'Casey's humor well. Louise Favier's obtuse, hysterical performance as a young wife abandoned for the cause is outweighed by Pauline Flanagan's vigor as a British sympathizer and Des Keogh's calm decency as the only man with the courage to talk back to the British soldiers. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

Present Laughter—As the monumentally egotistical West End star Garry Essendine, Frank Langella keeps the core of Noël Coward's 1939 comedy of bad manners alive with a full-tilt assault on the character's outrageousness. Unfortunately, the director, Scott Elliott, seems to think that he's liberating Coward by turning the play into a bisexual romp. (11/25/96) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200. Closes April 20.)

Psychopathia Sexualis—John Patrick Shanley's new comedy, about a man (Andrew McCarthy) who can't make love to his fiancée unless a pair of his father's argyle socks is within reach, is blessed with two wonderfully funny performances: Daniel Gerroll's, as a friend of the feckless fetishist, and Edward Herrmann's, as a hilariously inappropriate psychiatrist (he bangs a gavel on his desk to end sessions). Daniel Sullivan directed. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes April 20.)

Stanley—Circle in the Square springs back to life with this triumphant mounting of the Royal National Theatre production of Pam Gems's play about the British artist Stanley Spencer (1891-1959). Antony Sher's portrayal of Spencer, whose narcissism knew no bounds, is prodigiously energetic and emotional. The play itself has its limitations, but Sher's performance doesn't. John Caird is the director. (3/10/97) (50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200. Closes April 27.)

Stonewall Jackson's House—Jonathan Reynolds's comedy, about a woman who pushes the racial envelope, hits all its targets—from multiculturalism to the misuses of history—with deadly aim, and the versatile cast is hilarious. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

Tap Dogs—Australia's work-booted tap troupe brings its North American tour to New York. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

Wine-Blue-Open-Water—A modern staging of Homer's Odyssey, by the Gale Gates et al. company. (67 Broad St., fifteenth floor. 269-7858.)

The Young Man from Atlanta—Horton Foote's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, set in Houston

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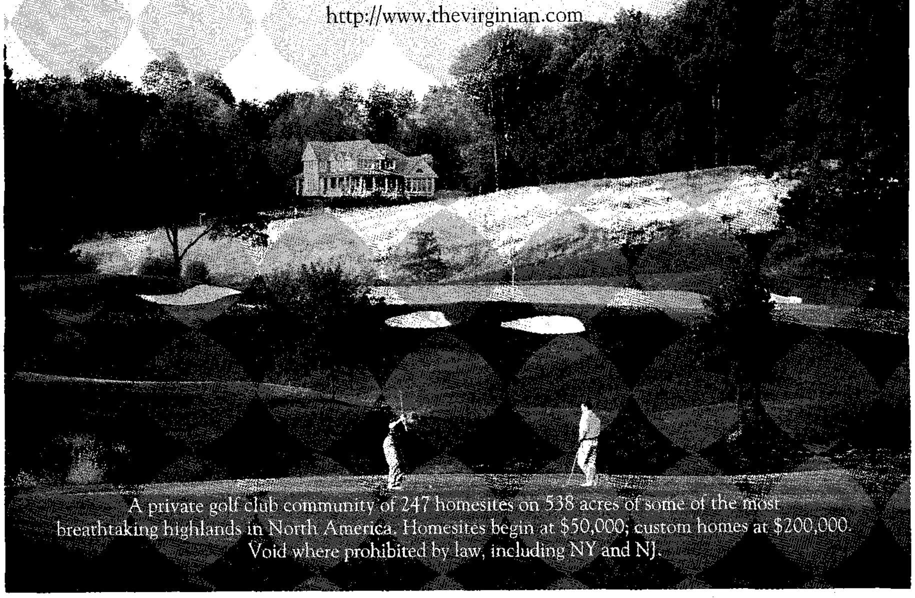

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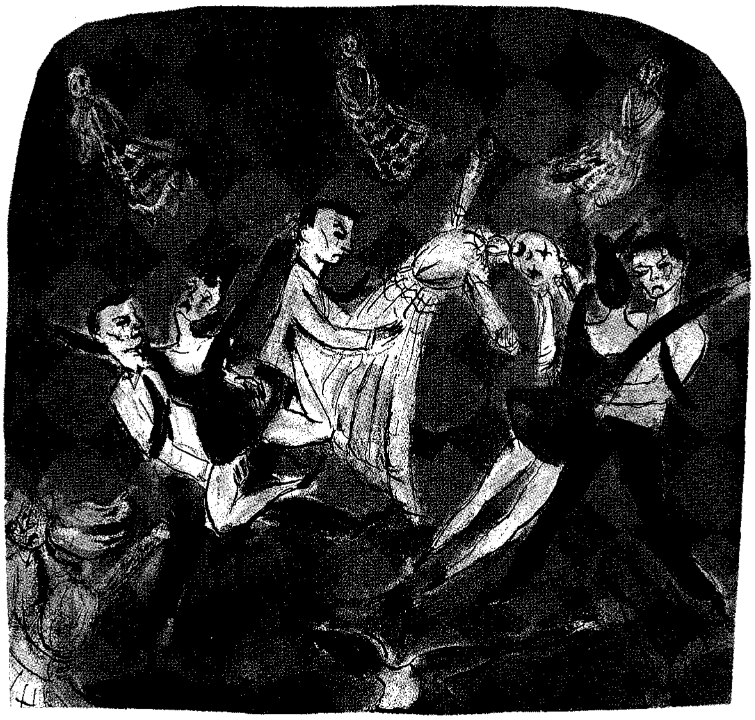
in 1950, is a house of cards propped up on the foundation of powerful performances by Rip Torn and Shirley Knight, as a couple whose only child killed himself six months earlier. What Foote catches in the play's slow, clumsy exposition is the maneuvers of denial which sustain optimism. The wife won't face the issue of suicide; the husband won't face the issue of homosexuality. The audience gets the point within the first ten minutes and then spends the next two hours waiting for the light to come on in the couple's befogged minds. Robert Falls is the director. (4/14/97) (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **BRING IN DA NOISE, BRING IN DA FUNK:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY STRIKES BACK!:** Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599. . . . **FULL GALLOP:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **HOWARD CRABTREE'S WHEN PIGS FLY:** Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **JOSEPH GABRIEL: MAGIC ON BROADWAY:** Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE KING AND I:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LATE NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **MASTER CLASS:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **ROB BECKER'S DEFENDING THE CAVEMAN:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 307-4100. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **VICTOR/VICTORIA:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.



Ballet Preljocaj, at the Joyce Theatre.

JULIA LICHT

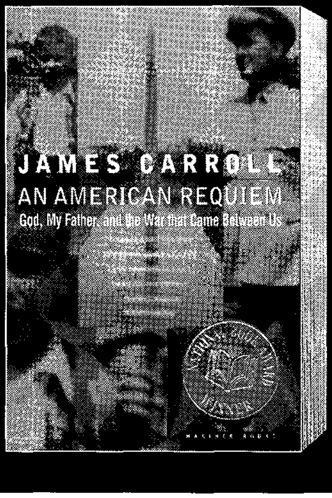
DANCE

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP—Joining the ARTEK ensemble and members of the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra for two programs. The first celebrates the composer Lou Harrison's eightieth birthday. The title of the new "Rhymes with Silver" (Silver is Harrison's middle name) is a Morris joke: "Tell me a word that actually rhymes with silver," Linda Dowdell, Morris's music director, demands. "You can't, and thus you can translate the title to mean 'There's no one like Lou.' " That program includes two more works set to Harrison, "Grand Duo" (1993) and "Strict Songs" (1987). The second presents some older Morris favorites: "Gloria" (1981), to Vivaldi; "Mosaic and United" (1993), to Cowell; "I Don't Want to Love" (1996), to Monteverdi madrigals; and "One Charming Night," a delightful if vampirish 1985 vehicle for Morris, to Purcell. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. April 15 at 7, April 17-19 at 8, and April 20 at 2 and 7.)

BALLET PRELJOCAJ—The French choreographer Angelin Preljocaj, appearing at the Joyce with his own company, creates disillusioned versions of classical ballets. In his remake of Fokine's "Le Spectre de la Rose," the courtly suitor of the original has become a series of taunting matadors. His "Les Noces," a Ballets Russes work originally choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska, turns the simple peasant wedding into a Peyton Place of attraction and revulsion, complete with the flinging of rag-doll brides and projectile leaps that overwhelm the earthbound men. But all this Gallic bodice-grabbing and provocation cannot obscure some pretty spectacular steps, as when the five couples in "Noces" perform a marvellously dithering sit-down Lindy on five park benches. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. April 15-19 at 8 and April 20 at 2 and 7:30.)

"EGG"—Choreographer Mia Lawrence takes inspiration from the shape and self-sufficiency of the hard-shelled ovum of the domestic chicken. With Chrysa Parkinson and Osmany Tellez. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. April 17-19 at 8 and April 20 at 3.)

"NAVEL, MY NAVEL"—Omphalocentric dances from soloist and videographer Dean Moss, chronicling epiphanies occasioned by his parents' remarriage, his travels through Senegal and Guatemala, and a late night at Bob's Java Jive. Throughout the performance, testimonials from



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— CHRISTOPHER LEHMANN-HAUPT, *New York Times*

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celebrities and strangers are projected on a screen. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. April 17-20 at 8:30.)

"Harlem's Great Dancing Ladies"—Sex- and septuagenarian tappers Marion Coles, Harriet Browne, and Norma Miller perform their favorite moves—the Cole Stroll, the Shim-sham, and the B.S. Chorus, respectively—then take their seats for a dance tribute by Mickey Davidson and the Savoy Swingers. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. For tickets, call 718-963-2081. April 20 at 7:30.)

Infinity Dance Theatre—A program by the six-member company of disabled and nondisabled dancers, which includes "Inside My Body Is a Dancer," "Gilchrist's Dream," and "The Last Night of the World." (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. 866-2847. April 19 at 8 and April 20 at 3.)

Garth Fagan Dance—The griot of modern dance offers repertory work, including "In the Beat/On the Moment," set to a score by Wynton Marsalis, and "Give Thanks," to the music of Foday Musa Suso. (Queens Theatre in the Park, Flushing Meadows–Corona Park. 718-760-0064. April 19 at 8 and April 20 at 3.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Barry Manilow—There's something comforting about the continuing saga that is Manilow. He hasn't had a smash like "Copacabana" or "Can't Smile Without You" since the Carter Administration, but he still inspires the hysterical adulation that unnerves crowd-control experts. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. April 16-20 and April 22-24, all at 8.)

"The Music of Count Basie"—Count Basie's band had two lives. In the thirties and early forties, it wore its Kansas City origins on its sleeve: it was loose-limbed, riff-obsessed, and stocked with individualists like Lester Young and Buck Clayton. In the fifties, the emphasis shifted to precision ensemble work and the defining visions of arrangers rather than soloists. Yet both incarnations swung like no big band before or since. In this performance, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra attempts to capture the band's split identity, with Basie's stalwart saxophonist Frank Foster on hand to set it on the right path. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. April 17 at 8.)

The Ron Horton Ensemble—Celebrating the thorny music of the sixties modernist Andrew Hill (who will give a concert here next week). Pianist Frank Kimbrough has the perennial iconoclast's quixotic rhythms and jagged melodies under his fingers; he and trumpeter Horton should make a good case for including Hill in the jazz canon. (Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. 708-9491. April 18 at 5:30.)

Bruce Cockburn—Over the past twenty-five years, this Canadian folk-rocker has turned his gritty, passionate intelligence to matters both personal and political. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. April 19 at 8.)

Purna Das Baul and Bapi—Mystical, erotically tinged Bengalese folk music. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. April 19 at 8.)

Värttinä—The ten-piece Finnish folk-pop ensemble. (St. Ann's Church, 157 Montague St., Brooklyn. 718-858-2424. April 19 at 8.)

"Project America 1997"—The 92nd Street Y's multidisciplinary program continues, focussing this week on early-American folk music. April 19 at 8: "Music in the Barn" features fife-and-drum music, English country dances, Scottish and Irish jigs, reels, and strathspeys, and a performance of Charles Ives's "In the Barn." . . . ¶ April 20 at 7: "New England Contradance," at which you receive a half hour's instruction, and then you're on your own. George Marshall calls the evening. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

Hossein Alizadeh and Kayhan Kalhor—Masters of traditional Persian music. (Symphony Space. April 20 at 7.)

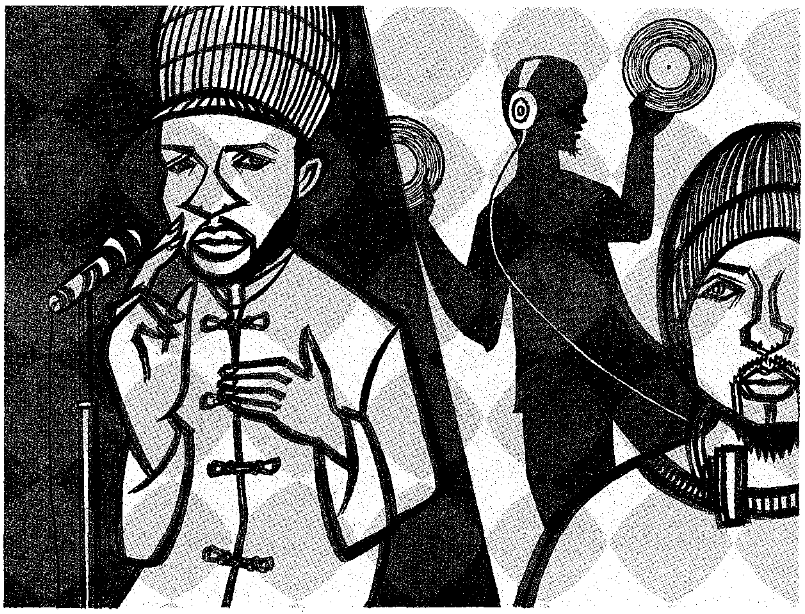
Iris DeMent / Leo Kottke—Back in 1992, when this gentle folk-country singer sprang fully formed from the Carter Family songbook, it would have been hard to imagine her wailing blues duets and railing against the corporate machine. But that's just what she does on her recent eye-opening album, "The Way I Should." Kottke, one of the most adventurous six- and twelve-string players around, has been making great acoustic-guitar records since the seventies. (Town Hall. April 20 at 8.)

John Tesh—The Yanni wanna-be. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. April 22 at 8.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is always advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—April 17: Walter Salas-Humara brings the **silos** back to town, and transplanted British guitarist **francis dunnery** drops by, plugged in and accompanied by his band. April 18: **ed palermo** and his big band play the music of Frank Zappa. Folk oddity **christine lavin** is in April 19.



Jeru the Damaja and DJ Shadow, at Tramps.

HIROSHI TANABE

Coney Island High, 15 St. Marks Pl. (674-7959)—April 20: To borrow a line from "Spinal Tap," the members of **modern english** are now full-time residents in the "Where Are They Now?" file. The band's classic New Wave hit "I Melt with You" came out in 1983 (and is now enjoying new airplay on Burger King ads). Swing by and see what they've been up to for the past fourteen years.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—**semi-gloss** brings in its ultra-low-key homegrown pop on April 19. The **mingus big band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—April 16: **fountains of wayne.** This excellent power-pop band from New Jersey (the name comes from a local statuary shop) has an easy, Beatle-esque flair but with a slightly tougher exterior. April 17: Eighties favorites **inxs** (sign of the times: beefcake lead singer Michael Hutchence once dated Patsy Kensit, who last week married Oasis's Liam Gallagher) perform with **radish,** the band of tomorrow. (Profiled in our issue of 4/7/97.) April 19-20: **kula shaker's** retro pop is regularly compared with that of other disturbingly popular English throwbacks, but, unlike the Stone Roses and Oasis, the quartet has found Hinduism. The Sanskrit mantras that serve as lyrics on their début album, "K," are a far cry from the sneering cynicism of Oasis.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—April 19: A rare appearance by **red krayola,** one of the original weirdo art-rock bands. With nineties cousins **gastr del sol.**

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-4064)—April 17: Former Jefferson Airplane vocalist **marty balin** and KBC Band guitarist **slick aguilar.** April 19: A celebratory appearance by **mojo nixon,** underground rock's eternal madman and the spiritual leader of all anti-establishment, nose-tweaking miscreants. With West Coast folk-popster **cindy lee berryhill.**

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—April 16: Top-shelf local rock with **44** and **you & what army.** April 17: The **candy butchers.** April 20: The Chicago-based **mighty blue kings** spin a neo-jump R. & B. April 21: Boston's **papas fritas** perform their unique show-tune-flavored pop.

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—A great grass hut with a fruit-and-bamboo motif, dedicated to calypso, reggae, and the bossa nova. April 17: Zydeco great **boozoo chavis** lays it down. Dining.

Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. (921-1940)—April 21: Having briefly fallen off the pop radar screen, the **brand new heavies** return with their breezy, accessible hybrid of smooth funk and contemporary jazz. April 22: Back in the seventies, **boz scaggs** established himself as a silky-smooth soft-rock artist with an occasionally inspired R. & B. jones. Since 1980, his recordings have been sporadic and inconsistent, but in 1994 he released the surprisingly fine "Some Change," which found his songwriting, guitar work, and tangy, ingratiating voice in strong form.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—April 17: **morris day & the time.** The zoot-suited Lothario is back, with a leaner version of the Time, but that doesn't mean the funk will be any less ferocious. When they break into "Jungle Love," just see if you can stand still. With special guest star **sandra st. victor,** from the Family Stand. April 18-19: An evening with two national legends: Big Easy pianist **dr. john** and Texas blues guitarist **clarence (gatemouth) brown.** April 22: **dj shadow** and **jeru the damaja.** The once-exotic practice of "sampling"—lifting a snippet of someone else's music (a funky rhythm by James Brown, say, or a crushing Led Zeppelin guitar chord) and then using that sample as the bedrock for a new composition—has become a major part of modern pop. A decade after digital samplers replaced the electric organ in the garage studios of America, a new breed of

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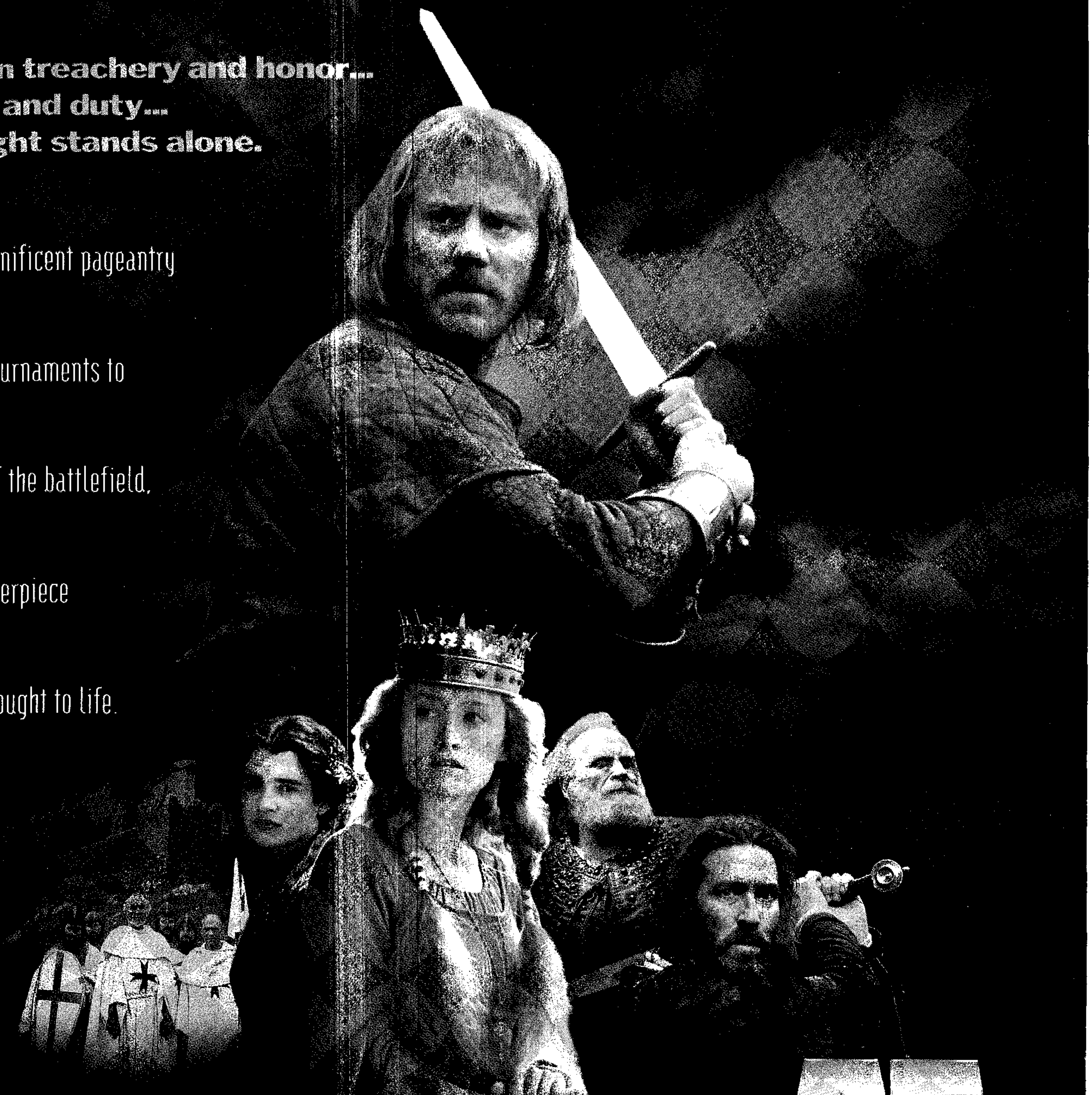

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artist is emerging—young scientists who appropriate freely to concoct some of the most original music you've ever heard, sometimes without ever playing a note. The most gifted member of this new school is California's DJ Shadow, a twenty-four-year-old savant who makes hypnotic music by layering the most unlikely sources into a throbbing aural soufflé. He first came to prominence last year, when the fine English label MoWax released the terrific "Endtroducing. . . . . DJ Shadow." Jeru the Damaja is an equally astounding left-of-center rapper.

Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. (353-1600)—April 17: MORPHINE could be a nifty guitar-pop outfit, except that the band has no guitarist. Miraculously, though, this eccentric composite of two-string bass, sax, and drums marries power pop to the squalid edginess of punk without the instrument fundamental to both genres (n.b.: show begins at 8).

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—April 18: MOJO NIXON (see Maxwell's) and the MIGHTY BLUE KINGS (see Mercury Lounge).

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—WESLIA WHITFIELD is at work in the Oak Room through May 3. Dining.

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—The legendary club has a new address and bigger digs. The BILLY CHILDS quintet is in through April 19. A piano virtuoso on the rise, Childs has spent quality time with Freddie Hubbard and Bobby Hutcherson, and better modernist upbringing can't be found. April 21: The TOSHIKO AKIYOSHI JAZZ ORCHESTRA. April 22: The PHILADELPHIA HERITAGE ART ENSEMBLE salutes two of that city's hard-bop heroes: trumpeter Lee Morgan and the underrated tenor saxophonist Hank Mobley. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Jazz, mirrors, and a gift shop. Through April 20: The MC COY TYNER big band. And you thought the pianist stirred up some sound with just a trio. His big band, stocked with such whooping soloists as trumpeter Eddie Henderson, trombonists Frank Lacy and Steve Turre, and saxophonist John Stubblefield, may be just a side project, but he revels in every celebratory second it's onstage. Starting April 22: JOÃO BOSCO and the LEO GANDELMAN group. Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—BARBARA COOK is in the Café Carlyle through May 3, with a tribute to Oscar Hammerstein II. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, pianist PETER MINTUN is in charge through May 3.

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Brass rails, vintage posters, Hirschfeld drawings, and a piano. April 16-19 brings the definition of a power trio: pianist JAMES WILLIAMS, bassist RON CARTER, and drummer TONY REDUS.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Way before klezmer was hip, ANDY STATMAN (April 16-17) was reaching back to the shtetl with his mournful clarinet and pushing it forward to the New World with his mandolin fusions. (When a man has honed his craft at bar mitzvahs and brisses, you know he's the real deal.) For these shows, he and his quartet will be performing and improvising on works from his latest album, "Between Heaven and Earth: Music of the Jewish Mystics."

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—The great cabaret in the sky. Statuesque chanteuse KAREN AKERS casts her spell through May 3.

Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. (929-7565)—April 16-17: The BRIAN LYNCH quintet. A prized sideman with everyone from Eddie Palmieri to Phil Woods, the fluent trumpeter will have drummer AL FOSTER on hand to jack up the intensity level that much higher. April 18-19: The TIM SESSIONS sextet.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—A jazz outpost where the musicians are always top-shelf. Through April 20: The accomplished soprano saxophonist JANE IRA BLOOM has too often had her head in the clouds, fooling around with electronic effects and going after a lighter-than-air lyricism to prove what a scintillating soloist she can be. Lately, though, she's been surrounding herself with vigorous players who have encouraged her to find her inner grit. Starting April 22: The CHICO FREEMAN quintet. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Saxophonist WESS ANDERSON (in through April 20) is a Southern player—that is, his tone spreads out like butter over grits. He was one of the down-home boys in Wynton Marsalis's septet, and the Coltrane-meets-New Orleans connection that has become his signature sound can be traced back to that exceedingly influential group. From April 22: The CHARLES MC PHERSON quartet. The VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA holds sway on Mondays.

TABLES FOR TWO

Aquavit, 13 W. 54th St. (307-7311)—For the past ten years, Aquavit has been quietly convincing New York that there's more to Swedish food than meatballs. Now, thanks to the recent arrival of chef Marcus Samuelsson, a twenty-six-year-old Ethiopian adopted by Swedish parents at the age of three, the restaurant is set for the next millennium. Situated in a regal town house behind the Museum of Modern Art, it's a formidable place, particularly the dining room, a seventy-five-foot atrium in which midtown's only indoor waterfall glides down a glistening copper wall and fills the space with a crisp, summery glow.

The restaurant's name refers to a curative beverage that dates back to the fifteenth century. The modern version—vodka infused with dill, fennel, toasted caraway, lingonberry, cloudberry, you name it—is offered here solo or in flights. (A flight is three flutes.) Also likely to cure, if it doesn't kill, is a heroic tasting menu that features salmon carpaccio, tuna paired with seared foie gras and port, a quivering lobster napoleon, and a juicy rack of lamb drizzled with truffle sauce.

On a smaller scale, the homely pickled herring becomes a star here. The house specialty, reddish matjes, is skinned and cured in spiced sugar-vinegar brine, but the adventurous may prefer the herring sampler, which comes with what the menu considers the "necessary accessories": a mug of Carlsberg and the aquavit of your choice. There's also venison with lingonberry and Merlot broth, or, when the season permits, tender snow grouse. And every Sunday the restaurant lays out a Volvo-size smorgasbord, where you might even find a meatball. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner, Saturdays for dinner only, and Sundays for brunch. Lunch entrées, $18-$22; prix-fixe dinner, $58.)

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—All that glisters is not gold: "Cartier: 1900-1939," an opulent exhibition of bijous from the great jewelry workshops of Paris, London, and New York, pretty much reaches the outer limits of glistering. Interestingly, the gaudiest objects here—a sparkling array of tiaras and diadems—were not bespoken by contessas and marquises but crafted to ensnare mad shoppers. Some of the bibelots, particularly those in exotic styles, are risibly tasteless: a trinket of a Japanese apple blossom, exhibited in a tiny vitrine, is indistinguishable from a tchotchke from Chinatown, except that it's made of ivory, enamel, gold, diamonds, moonstones, pink quartz, and rubellite. Through Aug. 3. . . . ¶ In "The Four Seasons," the Costume Institute charts changes in seasonal fashion, highlighting materials from eiderdown to spandex. Through Aug. 17. . . . ¶ "The Glory of Byzantium" is the museum's most spectacular exhibition in years, a colossal exploration of the art, history, and thought of what is known as the Second Golden Age of Byzantium, an era of unsurpassed imperial opulence which lasted from the mid-ninth century to the thirteenth. Through July 6. . . . ¶ "Giambattista Tiepolo." This ravishing assembly—more than sixty works, mostly paintings—strongly suggests that the eighteenth-century Venetian master, a pivot between the baroque and the rococo, is due for a fin-de-siècle reëvaluation. Through April 27. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—In an age of digital art, the humble collage can seem deceptively tame. Yet "The Photomontages of Hannah Höch" proves that the artist's imagination needs nothing more than scissors and a pot of glue—and stacks of newspapers and magazines. Through May 20. . . . ¶ "Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, the 1980s." Forty examples from the Abstract Expressionist's final working decade. Through April 29. . . . ¶ "Manuel Alvarez Bravo." The great Mexican photographer's career spans eight decades; this retrospective visits all of them and includes rare platinum prints he made in the sixties from earlier negatives. Through May 18. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"A Century of Sculpture: The Nasher Collection" features work by Brancusi, Giacometti, Matisse, Smith, and other twentieth-century artists. Through June 1. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway, at Prince St. (423-3500)—"Art/Fashion" presents garments and other piecework designed by visual artists. Through June 8. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Clearly, the curators of the 1997 Biennial exhibition, Lisa Phillips and Louise Neri, have determined not to make the same mistakes as their immediate predecessors. In contradistinction to the haranguing 1993 show, with its noisy emphasis on identity politics, they have stressed a more poetic (or more palatable?) approach to social issues—e.g., Wendy Ewald's photographs (which attempt to depict the dreams of underprivileged children) and Shazia Sikander's updated Persian miniatures (which investigate, for example, the place of women in a traditional society); the downside is that political engagement of any kind gets lost. This Biennial is, on the whole, hipper and smarter. What the show lacks—and no doubt lacks deliberately—is any sense of clearly articulated argument. Through June 1. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (860-6894)—You may not recognize his name, but the industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss (1904-72) had a greater impact on the way the world looks today than any fine artist of the century. For Dreyfuss, form followed function only if it made for an elegant line. This informative, stylishly installed exhibition spans the period of America's industrial golden age, from the futuristic idealism of the Twentieth Century Limited (the high-speed train immortalized by Howard Hawks, with help from John Barrymore and Carole Lombard) to the homely simplicity of the Princess phone—not to mention the John Deere tractor, the Westclox Big Ben alarm clock, or the Polaroid Swinger. Through Aug. 31. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 9, with no admission charge after 5; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (423-3200)—Chantal Akerman's most recent project, "D'Est" ("From the East"), continues in the inspired vein of her best art films ("Je, Tu, Il, Elle," "Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles"). Here she presents footage from an as yet unassembled feature documenting scenes of everyday life in the former Eastern Bloc. Akerman typically shoots in real time and favors long, mesmerizing, sometimes hilariously extended tracking shots. She dwells on the faces of her anonymous subjects with extraordinary attention, and the images seem radiant with empathy. In the wintry, ramshackle world she shows us, everything looks like an unbelievable hassle—boring, exhausting, and yet somehow shot through with poetry. "D'Est" is being screened in two formats: as an uninterrupted film projection and as a massive video installation, featuring twenty-five monitors arranged on pedestals, many of them on different loops, showing different sequences. The former option is definitely preferable to the self-consciously arty installation. Akerman's films are already art movies par excellence—why gild the lily? Through May 27. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

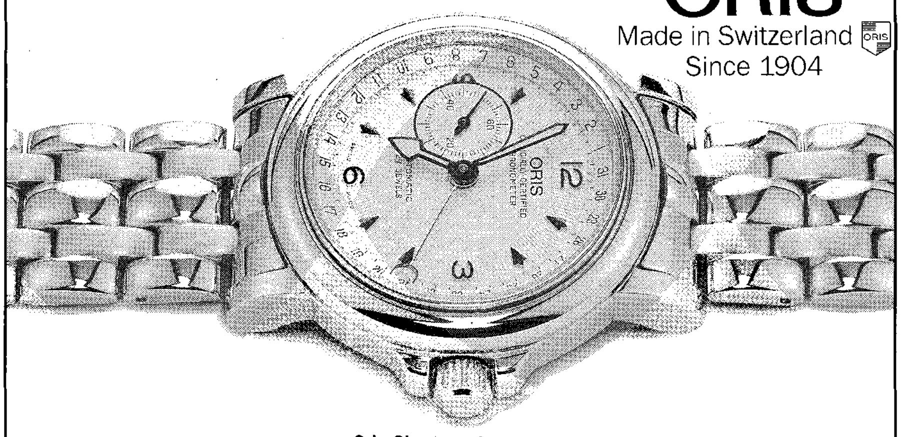
National Museum of the American Indian, 1 Bowling Green (668-6624)—"Agayuliyararput (Our Way of Making Prayer): The Living Tradition of Yup'ik Masks," an exhibition of elaborate masks from southwestern Alaska. The majority were collected in the late nineteenth century; the current show, which opened in Toksook Bay and Bethel, Alaska, was created in consultation with those Yup'ik communities. (Open daily, 10 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (869-8089)—"Let There Be Light: William Tyndale and the Making of the English Bible" assembles artifacts—including both known copies of his 1526 edition of the New Testament—that chronicle the life and surprising demise of this translator, who was burned at the stake as a heretic for his efforts. Gottesman Exhibition Hall; through May 17. (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, uptown and downtown galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; Chelsea galleries are generally closed Tuesdays and open Sundays.)

Michael Mazur—Luminous, well-ventilated abstractions that continually verge on landscape—or are they landscapes dripping into abstraction? The gorgeous palette, embracing hot oranges and coral pinks, wet greens and dusky blues, recalls Philip Guston and Joan Mitchell. While the visual vernacular is consistent, there is an impressive compositional



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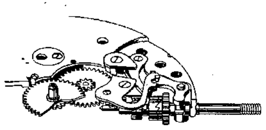

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diversity: "Two Hills" suggests the dreamy narrative ethos of a Chinese scroll painting, whereas the diptych "Growth" has the melting lyricism of Monet's water lilies. Through May 3. (Ryan, 24 W. 57th St. 397-0669.)

Tabitha Vevers—A willfully eccentric exhibition of shaped panels combining images of the human torso with cryptic symbols: a man with a womb, a woman's pelvis littered with eggshells. Classical allusions are scattered promiscuously, as in "Fire, Remembered," a visual macaronic that cryptically combines a pair of lovers, painted on a Pompeian-red ground, with a Mycenaean helmet. Through April 19. (Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 307-5730.)

Christian Vincent—Fragments of narrative, which invoke the world of Raymond Chandler and film noir. But this influence hasn't been very well digested, and neither has Edward Hopper's, which some of the canvases fairly shriek. Vincent has none of Hopper's humanity; he paints with real skill, using a darkly handsome palette of ambers and scarlets glinting in a sepia mist, but the effect is fussy. Through May 3. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545.)

Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat—Collaborative paintings from the mid-eighties. The artists' friendship was charmingly captured last year in Julian Schnabel's movie "Basquiat," which even features a droll scene of the two working on just the sort of paintings featured in this show. They could not have had less affinity in terms of either technique or personal mythologizing, yet even if these pictures are not completely successful, they have a sweet feeling, enhanced, no doubt, by our knowledge that neither artist was long for this world. Through April 26. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 744-2313.)

Short List—**tom christopher,** David Findlay, 984 Madison Ave., at 77th St. 249-2909. Open Mondays; through May 3. . . . **rackstraw downes** and **red grooms,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Open Mondays; both shows through May 3. . . . **grace hartigan,** ACA, 41 E. 57th St. 644-8300. Through May 3. . . . **bunny harvey,** Berry-Hill, 11 E. 70th St. 744-2300. Open Mondays; through May 3. . . . **william king,** Dintenfass, 20 E. 79th St. 581-2268. Through April 26. . . . **käthe kollwitz** and **lea grundig,** Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 245-6734. Through May 31. . . . **norman lundin,** Schmidt Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. 888-1122. Through April 26. . . . **aristide maillol,** C & M, 45 E. 78th St. 861-0020. Through June 7. . . . **katherine porter,** Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606. Open Mondays; through April 26. . . . **sophie ryder,** O'Hara, 41 E. 57th St. 355-3330. Open Mondays; through May 3. . . . **richard stankiewicz,** Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223. Through May 3. . . . **donald sultan,** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 794-0550. Through May 3. . . . **mark wethli,** Tatistcheff, 50 W. 57th St. 664-0907. Through April 24.

A 1969 photograph by Neal Barr, in "The Fords: Fifty Years in Fashion," at Staley-Wise.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Doug Aitken—Two installations by the video artist. "Diamond Sea" canvases the weird, seemingly extraterrestrial landscape of the Namib Desert, home to one of the world's richest diamond mines. Accompanied by a soundtrack of environmental noise and ambient music, the multiscreen projections are both ominous and beautiful. "Cathouse" consists of a Naumanesque maze in which every surface has been carpeted; two monitors show various people (including Iggy Pop) looking very, very nervous and jittery. Through April 26. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121. Closed Sundays.)

Linda Burnham—Oil-and-resin paintings on old tablecloths mounted on boards. The feeling the artist seems to be after is fifties domestic melodrama filtered through the lens of old comics. To further complicate matters, she inserts fifties high-art references, such as geometric and gestural passages that obviously refer to Hans Hoffman's famous "push-pull" principle for the creation of abstract compositions. It's all very cramped and uncomfortable, which is no doubt what the artist had in mind. Through April 19. (Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555.)

Mike Sale—"Twice a Day, Every Day," a video installation that requires the viewer to creep underneath the monitor, the screen of which faces the floor, in order to watch, close up, someone defecating. The effect is either funny or horrifying, depending on your mood. Sale, a Jamaican-born British artist, could have gone even further by taking a leaf from John Waters's book and providing scratch-and-sniff Odorama. Through April 27. (XL, 504 W. 22nd St. 462-4111.)

Short List—**nayland blake,** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through April 26. . . . **lewis de soto,** Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318. Through May 11. . . . **katherine dimma** and **allison smith,** Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937. Both shows through May 11. . . . **arturo du clos,** Nosei, 530 W. 22nd St. 741-8695. Through April 30. . . . **joe scanlan,** D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460. Through April 26. . . . **george stoll,** Morris Healy, 530 W. 22nd St. 243-3753. Through May 11. . . . **michael tong,** Kravets/Wehby, 529 W. 21st St. 352-2238. Through May 10.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Robert Mangold—"Zone Paintings," four large tripartite canvases by a virtuoso of minimalist elegance. In each one, paired ellipses flank a central rectangle. The painter's vocabulary of forms remains constant, but the effect is, as always, numinous. Through April 26. (Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224.)

Jason Rhoades—"Deviations in Space, Various Virgins," a gallery-wide installation by a young Los Angeles-based artist. How to describe this massive accumulation of junk, or the oblique yet palpable connections he creates within the chaos? Like a number of current artists, Rhoades wants to provoke a reaction—but more gentle temperaments may prefer to flee, and fast. Through April 26. (Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.)

Frank Stella—Two new monumental sculptures, which represent yet a further stage in his evolution. One seems to flirt with representation—it looks rather like a ruined rocket or jet fuselage—and the other is nothing short of stunning: a bizarre, Medusan coil of metal, vaguely reminiscent of the mad chapeaus that the British milliner Philip Tracey has been sending down the runways. Through April 26. (Gagosian, 136 Wooster St. 228-2828.)

Short List—**louise belcourt,** Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441. Through May 3. . . . **lena cronqvist,** Nordanstad, 289 Hudson St. 627-6628. Through April 26. . . . **suzanne etkin,** Holly Solomon, 172 Mercer St. 941-5777. Through May 31. . . . **walton ford,** Kasmin, 74 Grand St. 219-3219. Through May 10. . . . **barbara grinell,** A.I.R., 40 Wooster St. 966-0799. Through May 3. . . . **jane hammond,** Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St. 219-9600. Through April 26. . . . **michele harvey,** Bridgewater/Lustberg, 560 Broadway. 941-6355. Through April 19. . . . **nicholas kahn and richard selesnick,** Knowlton, 568 Broadway. 966-2625. Through May 3. . . . **oleg kulik,** Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300. Through April 26. . . . **ellen lanyon,** Zarre, 48 Greene St. 966-2222. Through May 10. . . . **june leaf,** Thorp, 103 Prince St. 431-6880. Through May 17. . . . **luigi ontani,** Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685. Through April 26. . . . **nicholas pearson,** Condeso-Lawler, 524 Broadway. 219-1283. Through May 3. . . . **mary putnam,** Bibro, 584 Broadway. 941-1734. Through May 17. . . . **miriam schapiro,** Steinbaum Krauss, 132 Greene St. 431-4224. Through April 26. . . . **lisa deanne smith,** White Columns, 154 Christopher St. 924-4212. Through May 4. . . . **keith sonnier,** Castelli, 420 West Broadway. 431-5160. Also at Klagsbrun, 80 Mercer St. 925-5157. Both shows through April 26. . . . **emmett williams,** Harvey, 537 Broadway. 925-7651. Through May 3.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Christie's—April 17: A sale of photographs, including thirty-seven images by André Kertész. . . . ¶ April 21: Rare books, including the autograph manuscript of Margaret Mitchell's early novel, "Lost Laysen." (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000.) . . . At **christie's east:** April 16: Items relating to Beatrix Potter. . . . ¶ April 17: an auction of modestly priced silver. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

Sotheby's—April 16: English and Continental silver. . . . ¶ April 18: Photography, including notable works by Margaret Bourke-White. Man Ray, and Gustave Le Gray. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Swann—April 17: A sale of rare books and literary memorabilia includes the manuscript of a story by Arthur Conan Doyle and the working typescript carbon (with extensive autograph changes) of Eugene O'Neill's play "The Fountain." . . . ¶ April 19: More than five hundred lots of photographs. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

Antiquarian Book Fair—A hundred and seventy dealers offering volumes on nearly everything imaginable. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. April 17-20. For information, call 777-5218.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Michael Ackerman—Buzzing, off-kilter black-and-white images of the vanishing street life of Times Square. Through April 27. (Bodell, 13 E. 7th St. 477-1820. Open Tuesdays through Sundays, noon to 7.)

Tina Barney—New tableaux with a twist: the subjects are nude. Through May 10. (Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166.)

Andrea Modica—These documentarylike portraits (the artist calls them "fictions"), mostly of children in rural Treadwell, New York, reveal the terrors of domestic discomfort with startling ease. Here, a boy stands near an overturned wading pool, hugging a tree; elsewhere, Barbara (Modica's most frequent subject) stands in a doorway, upset or just tired, staring reproachfully at the camera. Through April 19. (Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 628-5300.)

"Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A."—A delightful salon-style exhibit of sixty-six pictures made since the turn of the century. The installation smartly highlights echoes in similar images, such as a couple by Arthur Leipzig and one by Weegee, without overdoing it. Big names are here (a rarely exhibited ghostly steeplechase by Robert Frank is a great surprise), but very good (and notably affordable) work is also on hand from such lesser-known artists as Nat Fein, Kim Iacono, Vincent Cianni, Ben Ross, and Benn Mitchell. Through May 3. (Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766.)

"The Fords: Fifty Years in Fashion"—Famous models (Carmen Dell'Orefice, Dovima, Jean Shrimpton, Lauren Hutton) by famous photographers (Horst, David Bailey, Helmut Newton, Richard Avedon). Through May 10. (Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223.)

"The Sex Show"—Images of eroticism and exhibitionism by Paul Outerbridge, Jr., Edward Weston, Pierre Molinier, Larry Clark, Joel Peter Witkin, Merry Alpern, and others. Through May 17. (Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255.)

International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. (860-1777)—"Art & Science: Investigating Matter," a series of laboratory photographs by Catherine Wagner. Through June 15. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. (860-1777)—"Written in Memory: Portraits of the Holocaust," Jeffrey A. Wolin's images of survivors with handwritten texts on the surfaces of the prints. Through April 20. . . . ¶ "War Story," an installation by Mikael Levin. Through April 20. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Short List—**DAVID ARMSTRONG**, Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St. 861-9455. Through May 23. . . . **VAN DEREN COKE**, Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through May 17. . . . **LOIS CONNER**, Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. 226-1220. Through April 19. . . . **BRUCE GILDEN**, Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through May 17. Also at Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; through May 10. . . . **MICHAEL KENNA**, Mann, 42 E. 76th St. 570-1223. Through April 26. . . . **STEVEN KLEIN**, Staley-Wise, 47 Mercer St. 479-0852. Through April 30. . . . **INEZ VAN LAMSWEERDE**, Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through May 17. . . . . **O. WINSTON LINK**, McEnroe, 41 Greene St. 219-0395. Through April 19. . . . **HOLLY ROBERTS**, SoHo Photo, 15 White St. 226-8571. Open Fridays through Sundays, 1 to 6, and Tuesdays 6 to 8; through May 3. . . . **JINDRICH STYRSKY**, Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444. Through May 3. . . . **ARNE SVENSON**, Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Through May 10. . . . **JOHN SZARKOWSKI** and **WILLIAM CHRISTENBERRY**, Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Through May 10. . . . **JUAN USLÉ**, Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Open Tuesdays, closed Sundays; through May 31.

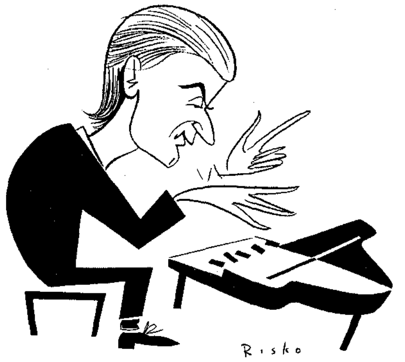
(See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Alice Tully Hall is 875-5050, and for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**MADAMA BUTTERFLY**, with Maria Spacagna, Franco Farina, and Frederick Burchinal; conducted by John Fiore. (April 16 at 7:30.) . . . With Walter Fraccaro instead of Mr. Farina. (April 21 at 7:30.) . . . **DIE WALKÜRE**, with Janis Martin, Deborah Voigt, Hanna Schwarz, Plácido Domingo, James Morris, and Matti Salminen; James Levine. (April 17 at 6:30.) . . . **FAUST**, with Veronica Villarroel, Richard Leech, Dwayne Croft, and Robert Lloyd; Julius Rudel. (April 18 at 8.) . . . **EUGENE ONEGIN**, in a new production, with Galina Gorchakova, Marianna Tarassova, Vladimir Chernov, Mr. Farina, and Vladimir Ognovenko; Antonio Pappano. (April 19 at 12:30.) . . . **SIEGFRIED**, with Hildegard Behrens, Heidi Grant Murphy, Birgitta Svendén, Wolfgang Schmidt, Graham Clark, Mr. Morris, Ekkehard Wlaschiha, and Mr. Salminen; Mr. Levine. (April 19 at 6.) . . . **FEDORA**, with Mirella Freni, Ainhoa Arteta, Mr. Domingo, and Mr. Croft; Roberto Abbado. (April 22 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)



Jean-Yves Thibaudet, at Avery Fisher Hall.

New York City Opera—**THE VISIT OF THE OLD LADY**, by Gottfried von Einem, with mezzo-soprano Joyce Castle. (April 16 at 8.) . . . **RIGOLETTO**. (April 18 at 8.) . . . A double bill of Orff's **CARMINA BURANA** and Weill's **THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS**. (April 19 at 1:30.) . . . **TURANDOT**. (April 19 at 8.) . . . **DON GIOVANNI**. (April 20 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

Juilliard Opera Center—Presenting a double bill of Offenbach's "Monsieur Choufleuri" and Puccini's "Gianni Schicchi." (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. 769-7406. April 16 and April 18 at 8 and April 20 at 2.)

Clarion Music Society—The ensemble presents a concert version of John Blow's masque "Venus and Adonis," composed about 1685 as an entertainment for Charles II. Frederick Hammond conducts the period-instrument players, with sopranos Julianne Baird and Monica Donakowska and baritone James Weaver; members of the Ken Pierce Baroque Dance Company perform courtly dances as entr'actes. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. April 21 at 8.)

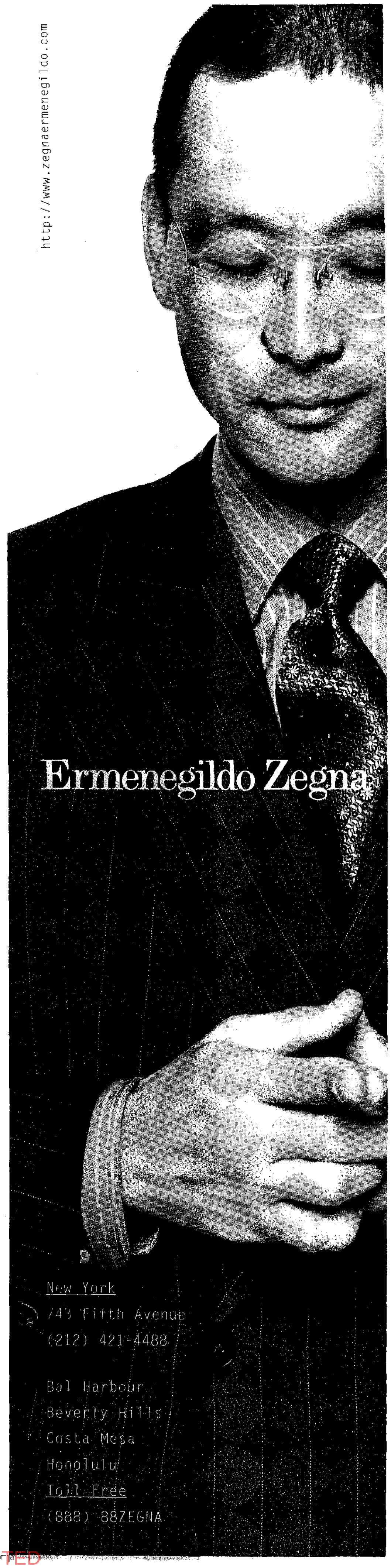
ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

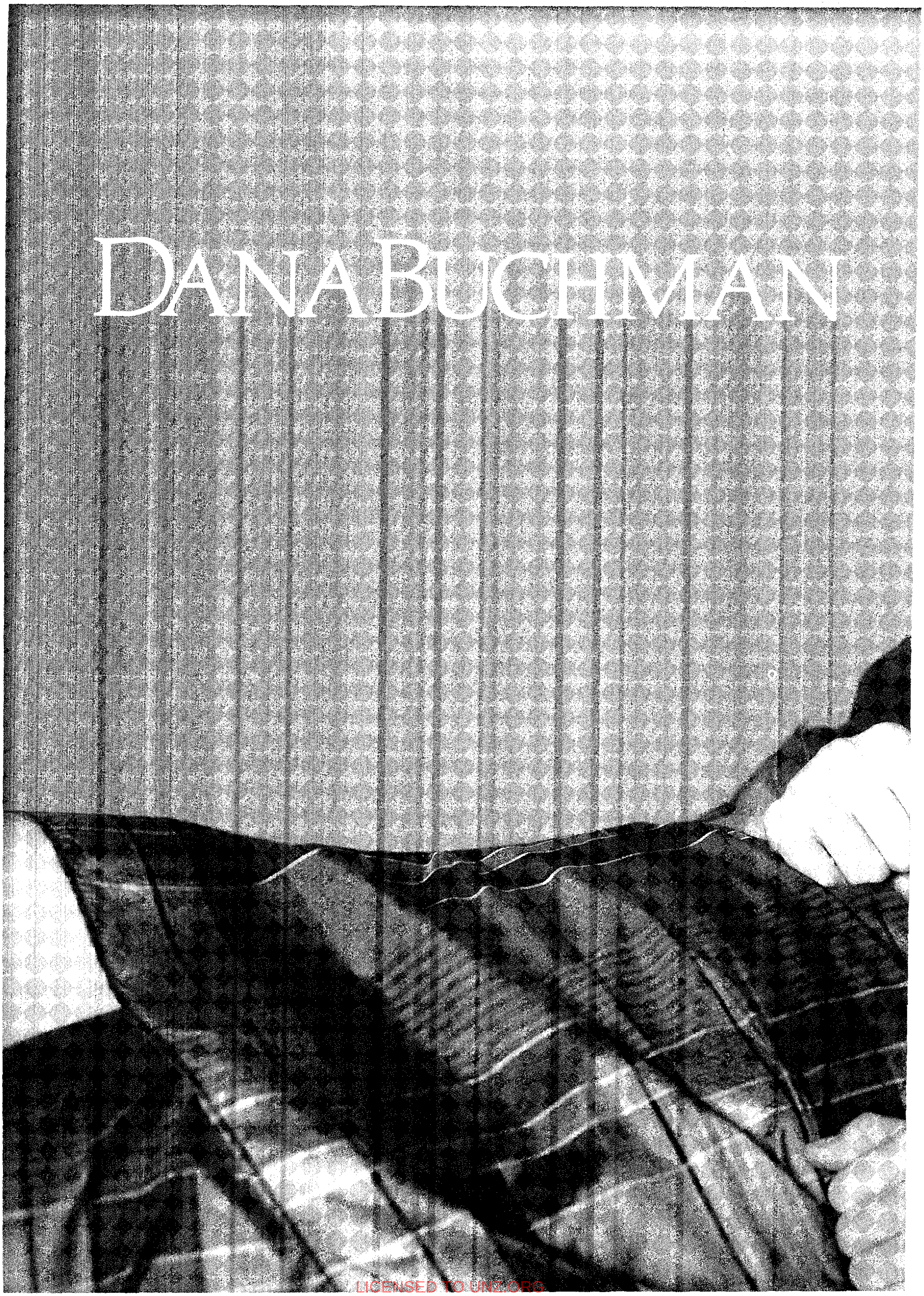
New York Philharmonic—André Previn conducts the première of his vocal scena "The Magic Number," to a poem by Dory Previn Shannon (to whom he was married for several years in the early sixties), with soprano Sylvia McNair as soloist. Also on the program are Haydn's Symphony No. 96, a pair of Mozart arias (with Ms. McNair), and Ravel's complete "Mother Goose" ballet score. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. April 17 and April 19 at 8 and April 18 at 2.)

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra—Yakov Kreizberg conducts Debussy's "Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune," Dutilleux's Cello Concerto (with Lynn Harrell), and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6. (Carnegie Hall. April 17 at 8.)

Concerto Italiano—Harpsichordist Rinaldo Alessandrini leads his period-instrument ensemble in Vivaldi's 1726 serenata "La Sena Festeggiante" (RV 693). The High Baroque Italian serenata is much overshadowed today by its relatives, the cantata and the opera, but in striking a balance between the two it may be better suited than either of them to modern audiences. A serenata's sequence of arias and ensembles can resemble a very long cantata, but its orchestration is richer, and, though it usually involves some light, unstaged

ROBERT RISKO

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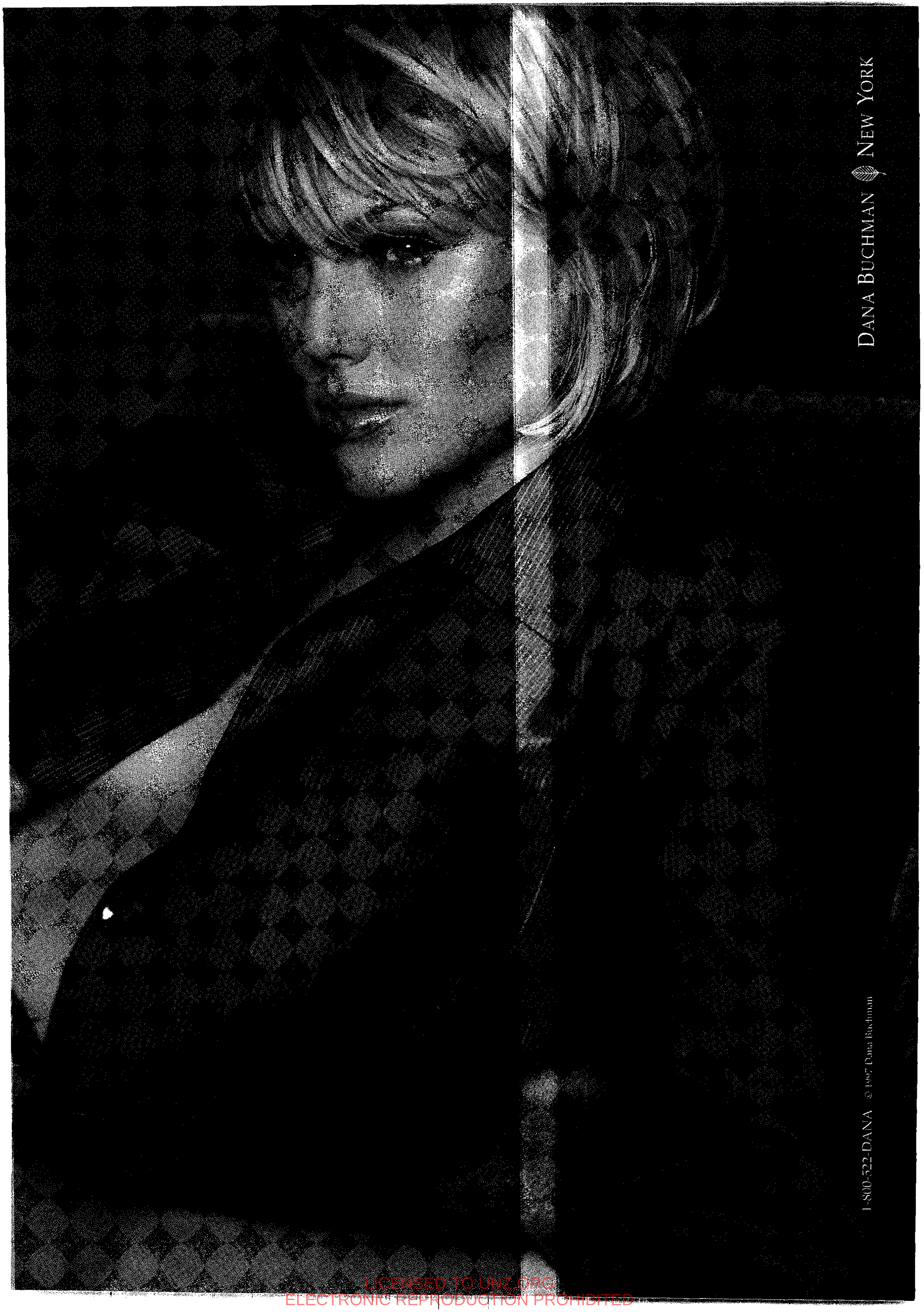
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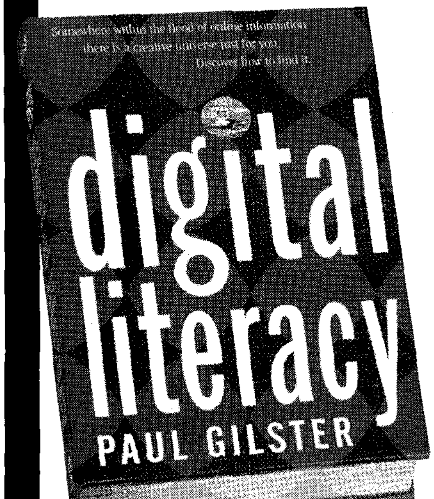
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plot with a few characters ("La Sena Festeggiante" has three), it avoids the complicated longueurs and frequent pomposity of opera seria. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. April 18 at 8.)

MUSIC FOR ALL SEASONS ORCHESTRA—A freelance ensemble, organized for a benefit concert that includes Haydn's D-Major Cello Concerto (with Janos Starker), some Puccini arias (with soprano Roberta Peters), and what is billed "a surprise birthday tribute to Dudley Moore" (so don't tell him). David Alan Miller conducts. (Carnegie Hall. April 19 at 7:30.)

NEW YORK CHAMBER SYMPHONY—Performing Bach's "Brandenburg" Concerto No. 3, Aaron Jay Kernis's Double Concerto (with guitarist Sharon Isbin and violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg), the première of Henri Lazarof's Oboe Concerto (featuring Allan Vogel), and an orchestral scaling-up of Verdi's String Quartet. Gerard Schwarz conducts. (Alice Tully Hall. April 19 at 8 and April 20 at 5.)

CITY ISLAND BAROQUE ENSEMBLE—Violinist Lara St. John is the soloist in two concertos by Bach. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. April 20 at noon.)

MUSICA VIVA—To celebrate its twentieth anniversary, the chorus and orchestra, directed by Walter Klauss, perform Mozart's Requiem (in the traditional Süssmayr completion) and his E-Flat-Major Piano Concerto (K. 449, featuring Jeanette Micklem), in addition to the première of Bruce Saylor's "A Scattering of Salts" (a concerto for piano, chorus, and orchestra). (All Souls Unitarian Church, Lexington Ave. at 80th St. 794-3646. April 20 at 7.)

CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA—Kent Tritle directs Poulenc's Gloria and his Organ Concerto (featuring Nancianne Parrella), as well as Saint-Saëns's rarely performed Requiem. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. April 22 at 8.)

RECITALS

KRYSTIAN ZIMERMAN—The pianist performs sonatas by Haydn, Beethoven (in E Major, Op. 109), and Schubert (in A Major, D. 959). (Carnegie Hall. April 16 at 7:30.)

KALICHSTEIN-LAREDO-ROBINSON TRIO—Colleagues assist the ensemble in performing Brahms's Clarinet Trio, his Horn Trio, and his G-Minor Piano Quartet. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. April 16 at 8.)

MUSIC BY ALVIN LUCIER—An evening of works by a composer whose interests encompass environmental sonic installations and the translation of brain waves, physical gestures, and visual imagery into sound. The program includes his "Music for Gamelan Instruments, Microphones, Amplifiers, and Loud Speakers," with four narrators speaking loudly. (Weill Recital Hall. April 16 at 8.)

GUARNERI QUARTET—April 16 at 8: The foursome plays string quartets by Mozart (in F Major, K. 168) and Bartók (his First); colleagues join them for Dvořák's A-Major Sextet. (Alice Tully Hall.) . . . ¶ April 19 at 8: Quartets by Mendelssohn (in D Major, Op. 44, No. 1), Fauré (in E Minor), and Schubert ("Death and the Maiden"). (Washington Irving High School, Irving Pl. at 16th St. For information about tickets, call 586-4680.)

BARGEMUSIC—A passel of string players performs Puccini's "Crisantemi," as well as string quintets by Beethoven (in C Major) and Brahms (in G Major). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. April 17 at 7:30 and April 20 at 4.)

DA CAPO CHAMBER PLAYERS—You might want to take along your umbrella, since all the works on this program have to do with water, whether steam, rain, or bodies of. On the program are Joan Tower's "Amazon," Crumb's "Vox Balaenae" ("Voice of the Whale"), Takemitsu's "Toward the Sea," Eisler's "Fourteen Ways to Describe the Rain," and Peter Sculthorpe's "Songs of Sea and Sky." (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. April 17 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

JAIME LAREDO AND REIKO UCHIDA—The violinist and the pianist perform sonatas by Mozart, Strauss, and Brahms, as well as Schubert's G-Minor Sonatina. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. April 17 at 8.)

KYOKO TABE—Pianist, performing works by Takashi Yoshimatsu and Schumann (his "Symphonic Études), as well as sonatas by Beethoven (in C-Sharp Minor, the "Moonlight") and Schubert (in B-Flat Major, D. 960). (Weill Recital Hall. April 17 at 8.)

NICOLE ROSE—Colleagues assist the singer and oboist in works by Bach, Crumb (his Madrigals, Book III), William Dowling, and Gareth Farr. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. April 17 at 8.)

ALFRED BRENDEL—The pianist performs Busoni's Elegies No. 3 and No. 6, Schumann's C-Major Fantasy, Haydn's G-Major Sonata (No. 40), and seven pieces by Liszt (including his "Sonetto del Petrarca No. 104"). (Carnegie Hall. April 18 at 7:30.)

JARD VAN NES—The Dutch mezzo-soprano performs songs by Caroline Ansink, Wolf, Strauss, and others, with pianist David Selig. (Weill Recital Hall. April 18 at 8.)

458 STRINGS—The assemblage of bowed, plucked, and keyboard-activated stringed instruments, which doubles as the continuo group of the Artek Ensemble, performs music by Monteverdi, Purcell, Corelli, Bach, and others; with soprano Jessica Tranzillo. (St. Michael's Church, Amsterdam Ave. at 99th St. April 18 and April 20 at 8. For information about tickets, call 873-0473.)

NEW YORK PHILOMUSICA CHAMBER ENSEMBLE—The group presents Haydn's E-Major Piano Trio, Fauré's C-Minor Piano Quartet, and Schubert's "Trout" Quintet. (Alice Tully Hall. April 20 at 2:30.)

JEAN-YVES THIBAUDET—The pianist performs Debussy's Préludes (Book Two) and "L'Isle Joyeuse," Liszt's "Jeux d'Eau à la Villa d'Este" and Second Ballade, and transcriptions (by Liszt) from "Rigoletto," "Tannhäuser," and "Tristan und Isolde." (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. April 20 at 3.)

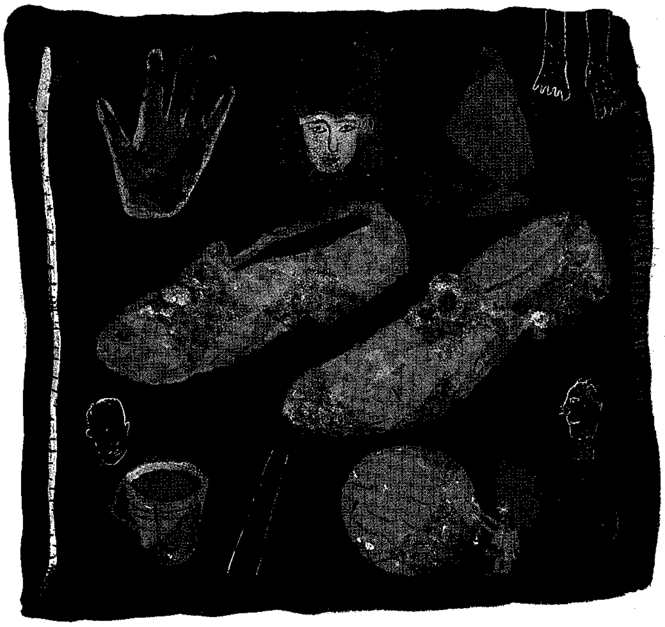
"ON WINGS OF SONG"—The Penderecki String Quartet is featured in a concert of vocal chamber works: eighteenth-century Italian arias (with soprano Olga Makarina), Respighi's "Il Tramonto" (with mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe), and Barber's "Dover Beach" (with baritone Marcus deLoach). (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. 734-2130. April 20 at 3. A benefit concert.)

"GUITAR AMONG OTHERS"—Guitarist Winslow Browning and narrator Isaiah Sheffer offer a rare complete performance of "Platero and I," with music by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco and poems by Juan Ramón Jiménez (who wrote them nearly a half century before he was awarded the 1956 Nobel Prize for Literature.) The narrative cycle, about a poet, his amiable donkey, and their Andalusian town, was set to music in 1960 for Andrés Segovia (who performed some of its movements, but never its entire span of twenty-eight pieces). The work has become a cult classic among guitarists and has been recorded not only with the original Spanish poems but also with the poems in English, German, and Japanese translation, and in the late nineteen-seventies it was even produced in a filmstrip version, for use in schools. (St. Luke In-the-Fields, 487 Hudson St., at Grove St. April 20 at 4. For information about tickets, call 718-788-1988.)

JESSYE NORMAN—The soprano performs the première of Richard Danielpour's "Sweet Talk" (a cycle of four vocal-chamber-music movements to texts by Toni Morrison), in addition to songs by Brahms, Schubert, and Poulenc; with pianist Mark Markham, cellist Peter Wiley, and double-bassist Edgar Meyer. (Carnegie Hall. April 20 at 5.)

DOUGLAS BOYD—The oboist, Scottish born and French trained, plays sonatas by C. P. E. Bach, J. S. Bach, and Telemann, assisted by harpsichordist John Gibbons (who also offers two Scarlatti sonatas and J. S. Bach's D-Major Partita). (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. April 20 at 5.)

ORGAN ALERT—The Church of the Holy Apostles has installed an impressive new organ, a thirty-one-stop, three-manual (plus pedal) tracker instrument by the firm of J. L. van den Heuvel, of Dordrecht, Holland. The instrument was originally constructed, in 1994, for a vast



Preparing for Earth Day: mud sculpting at Wave Hill.

MAIRA KALMAN

private home in Texas, but the owners decided to sell it last year, just as the church was reaching the final stage of its restoration following a devastating fire. Though entirely capable of representing Baroque and modern repertoire, the instrument is conceived along the lines of the French Romantic school, with a panoply of fanciful timbres augmenting the classic tonal disposition. McNeil Robinson inaugurates a new concert series spotlighting the instrument, in a program that includes Bach's C-Minor Passacaglia, Franck's "Final," Hindemith's Second Sonata, and Reger's "Benedictus and Toccata" (Op. 59), as well as his own Choral Prelude on "Llanfair" and improvisations on themes submitted by the audience. (296 Ninth Ave., at 28th St. 807-6799. April 21 at 8.)

JULIAN BREAM—The distinguished guitarist plays music by Bach, Sor, Takemitsu, and others. (Alice Tully Hall. April 22 at 8.)

ALSO OF INTEREST

MOLLIE NICHOLS: Organist. (St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Ave. at 50th St. 378-0248. April 16 at 8.) . . . **ELLEN ORNER:** Playing violin works by Benjamin Lees, Ives, and others. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. April 17 at 2. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 996-1100.) . . . **FELIPE RAMÍREZ:** Pianist. (Spanish Institute, 684 Park Ave. 628-0420. April 17 at 6.) . . . **ENSEMBLE DI ROMA:** Rinaldo Alessandrini leads Venetian Baroque works. (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 347. April 17 at 6:15.) . . . **AMATO OPERA COMPANY:** Presenting "The Barber of Seville." (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. April 18-19 at 7:30.) . . . **DICAPO OPERA THEATRE:** "Madama Butterfly." (184 E. 76th St. 288-9438. April 18-19 at 8 and April 20 at 3.) . . . **ŠKAMPA STRING QUARTET:** Quartets by Mozart, Janáček, and Ravel. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. 229-5689. April 20 at 2.) . . . **CANTATA SINGERS:** Works by Liszt and Miriam Gideon. (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. April 20 at 3. Tickets at the door.) . . . **EREZ OFER AND ILAN RECHTMAN:** Violinist and pianist, performing Brahms's D-Minor Violin Sonata, among other works. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. April 20 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.) . . . **WEST VILLAGE CHORALE:** Music by Mendelssohn, Thomas Beveridge, and Elliot Z. Levine. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. April 20 at 8.) . . . **NARI MATSUURA:** Pianist. (Mansfield Hotel, 12 W. 44th St. April 21 at 8. No tickets necessary.) . . . **FLUX QUARTET:** Twentieth-century works, with pianist David Oei. (Landon gallery, 1926 Broadway, at 64th St., third floor. 721-8277. April 22 at 8:30.)

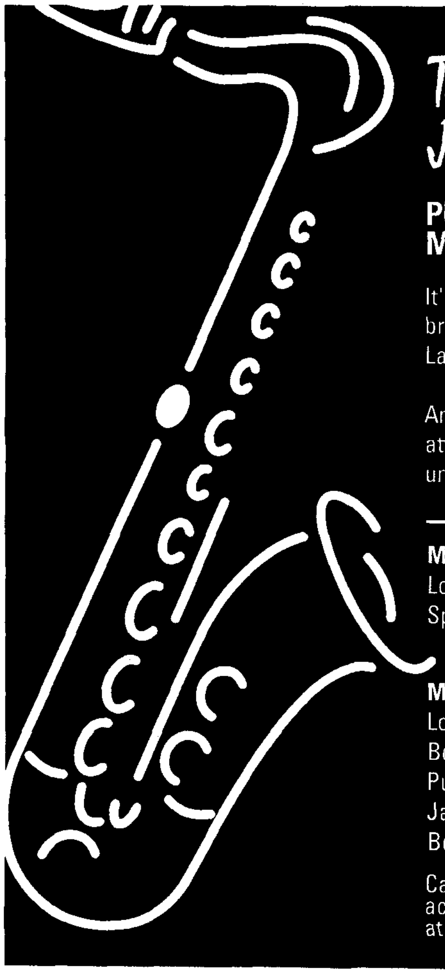
ABOVE AND BEYOND

BE GOOD TO YOUR MOTHER—Earth Day falls on April 22 this year, but as the forces of environmentalism know no bounds a variety of events have been scheduled for the preceding days. April 17-19 at 7:30 and April 20 at 3 and 7:30: Choreographer Judy Dworin evokes prehistoric goddess worship with "Ma," a work featuring a well-endowed mother figure in a burlap mask and a costume of rope and netting, and a percussive score by Tony Steve. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.) . . . ¶ April 19 at 9:30 A.M.: Volunteers offer a chance to help clean up Gerritsen Creek, on Jamaica Bay. For more information, call 718-743-0632 . . . . ¶ April 19 at 9:30 A.M.: The Sierra Club presents a tour of a recycling plant in Ridgewood, Brooklyn. For more information, call 877-5088. . . . ¶ April 19, from noon to 3: A Native American Shad Festival, with Christopher Letts, the environmental educator of the Hudson River Foundation, cooking the fish the way it was prepared before the arrival of Henry Hudson. (Inwood Hill Park Urban Ecology Center, 218th St. and Indian Rd. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ April 19-20, from 1 to 4: Artist Noah Baen leads the loam-loving in a hands-on mud-sculpting workshop. (Wave Hill, W. 249th St. at Independence Ave., the Bronx. For information, call 718-549-3200.)

READINGS—April 16 at 7: Linda Yablonsky reads from her novel, "The Story of Junk." (Three Lives & Co., 154 W. 10th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ April 17 at 6:30: Former Peace Corps volunteer Michael Maren reads from "The Road to Hell," his account of the darker side of foreign aid. (Biblio's, 317 Church St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ April 17 at 8: Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award winners Campbell McGrath and Lucia Perillo read from their work. (Dodge Hall, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ April 20 at 3: Poets Philip Levine and Juanita Brunk read their verse. (Posman Books, 1 University Pl. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS—April 16 at 6: Gardeners Jamaica Kincaid, Linda Yang, and Michael Pollan sift through the new edition of Katherine S. White's collected *New Yorker* gardening essays from the fifties to the seventies, "Onward and Upward in the Garden." (Smith & Hawken, 394 West Broadway. For reservations, which are required, call 925-1190.) . . . ¶ April 17 at 6: Alfred Mac Adam, professor of Spanish-American literature at Barnard, leads a conversation with translators Gregory Rabassa and Clifford Landers about rendering Portuguese into English. (Americas Society, Park Ave. at 68th St. For reservations, which are required, call 249-8950, ext. 369.) . . . ¶ April 20 at 7:30: Comet co-discoverer Alan Hale talks about his find. (American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. 769-5200.)

WALK—April 20 at 1: Urban historian Katia Howard wanders the South Bronx that Sherman McCoy never found, on a Municipal Art Society tour of the Mott Haven Historic District. For more information, call 935-3960.



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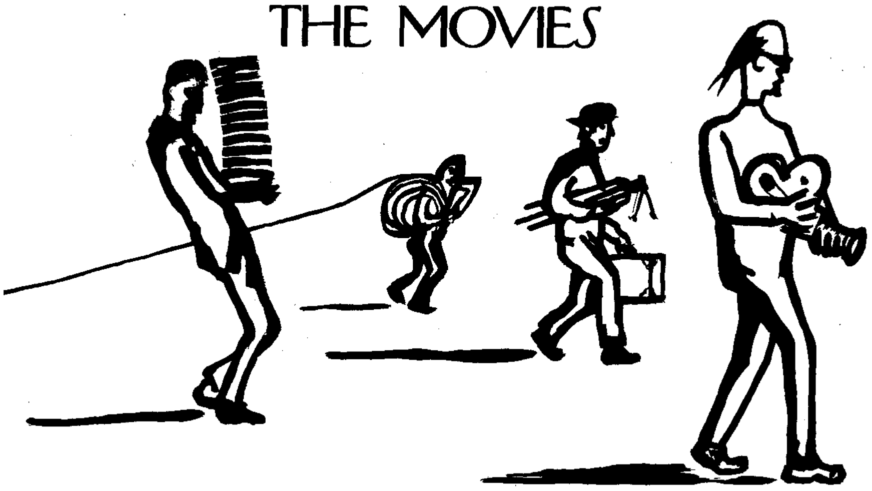
THE MOVIES



FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

Camp Stories—Director Herbert Beigel's début feature centers on a fifteen-year-old (Zachary Taylor) at a Jewish summer camp in the late fifties. Opening April 18. (Cinema 3rd Avenue.)

Eight Heads in a Duffel Bag—Joe Pesci plays a hit man whose incriminating luggage is mistakenly switched at the airport, in a comedy written and directed by Tom Schulman. Opening April 18. (84th Street Sixplex, Embassy 2, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.)

Gamera: Guardian of the Universe—A thirtieth-anniversary return of the heroic two-hundred-foot super-turtle from Japan. Directed by Shusuke Kaneko. In Japanese. Opening April 16. (Film Forum.)

Hollow Reed—Angela Pope's drama examines the conflicts between a divorced couple (Martin Donovan and Joely Richardson), their son (Sam Bould), and their new loves (Ian Hart and Jason Flemyng, respectively). Written by Paula Milne. Opening April 18. (Quad Cinema.)

Kissed—Lynne Stopkewich's début film, co-written with Angus Fraser, about a young woman (Molly Parker) who takes a job at a funeral home because she loves male cadavers. Opening April 18. (Angelika Film Center.)

McHale's Navy—Former Commander Quinton McHale (Tom Arnold) is enjoying retirement on a Caribbean island until his leisure is disturbed by an uptight captain (Dean Stockwell) and a terrorist (Tim Curry), in a comedy directed by Byran Spicer, based on the sixties television series. Opening April 18. (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Manhattan Twin, National Twin, Orpheum VII, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Murder at 1600—Wesley Snipes and Diane Lane star as a detective and a Secret Service agent investigating a homicide at a well-known Washington address, in a thriller directed by Dwight Little. Opening April 18. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Traveller—Reviewed below in Current Films. Opening April 18.

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 29.)

Anaconda—A film crew in the Brazilian rain forest finds more than it bargained for, in a thriller written by Hans Bauer, Jim Cash, and Jack Epps, Jr., and directed by Luis Llosa. With Jennifer Lopez, Ice Cube, Jon Voight, and Eric Stoltz. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Astor Plaza, 84th Street Sixplex, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Anna Karenina—A faithful new adaptation of the Tolstoy novel which trots out plenty of clichés (an orgasmic Tchaikovsky soundtrack, foreboding shots of a speeding train) but has a few things going for it, too. Filmed in posh imperial-Russian villas and palaces, it looks both beautiful and convincing. And it tells the story from the point of view of Levin (Alfred Molina), the melancholy, philosophical friend of Anna's brother. By broadening the scope, the writer-director, Bernard Rose, gets closer to Tolstoy: the theme isn't merely passion, it's hanging onto the desire to live when life is endless pain. The drawback to this approach is that we also get more of Kitty, Levin's perky-angelic wife. Even the best of actresses would have trouble bringing this adorable male fantasy to life, and Mia Kirshner, who plays her here, is far from the best of actresses. At least Sean Bean, as Vronsky, makes a good, strapping, intermittently sensitive macho. And Sophie Marceau's focussed, reflective performance as Anna single-handedly carries the film through its hackneyed patches. She makes passion subtle.—S.K. (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

Boys Life 2—Two years ago, the first "Boys Life" proved there was an audience for short, gay-themed films, and this latest bundle is more consistent than the last. The best of the four is "Alkali, Iowa," written and directed with great confidence and care by Mark Christopher. A jewel of a story about a young gay farmer's investigation into his father's past, it makes its points so quietly and indirectly that it comes close to poetry.—B.D. (Quad Cinema.)

Chasing Amy—In Kevin Smith's low-budget comedy, a young comic-book artist (Ben Affleck) falls in love—against his better judgment—with a pretty, vivacious blonde (Joey Lauren Adams), who is, inconveniently, a lesbian. Although Smith deserves credit for inventing an ingenious romantic-comedy premise, he doesn't have the skill to maintain a pleasurable sense of anticipation for an entire movie. This picture, his third, is as crummy-looking and as sluggishly paced as his début feature, "Clerks" (1994); at this point, his amateurishness can't be explained away as a suburban-grunge aesthetic style, or as any kind of style at all. Also with Jason Lee and Dwight Ewell.—T.R. (4/7/97) (Angelika Film Center, Cinema II, and Lincoln Square.)

The Devil's Own—Tom O'Meara (Harrison Ford), the hero of Alan J. Pakula's new movie, is a middle-aged New York City cop, who, out of the goodness of his Irish-American heart, takes in a shy, taciturn young immigrant named Rory Devaney (Brad Pitt) and then discovers that his polite lodger is in fact an I.R.A. terrorist on an arms-purchasing mission. This is a star vehicle, but both stars shed dim light here, as if they were coming to us from a galaxy far, far away. And the movie is resolutely unsuspenseful; Pakula does everything in his power to insure that we won't mistake his apparent thriller for a *real* thriller. What's most excruciating about his serious, adult approach is that it deprives us of basic action-movie entertainment without compensating us in the form of a single idea that an adult could take seriously. Also with Margaret Colin, Rubén Blades, Treat Williams, and George Hearn.—T.R. (4/7/97) (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 64th & 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

Double Team—As he did with Ringo Lam on last year's under-appreciated "Maximum Risk," Jean-Claude Van Damme teams up with a Hong Kong director, this time Tsui Hark, and delivers a great action flick. And his co-star, Dennis Rodman, makes a likable movie début as an arms dealer with the fashion sense of an Audrey Hepburn on acid. The story involves the usual international-terrorism organizations and the wife-in-harm's-way plotting, but there's a nifty twist halfway through, when Van Damme is "retired" to an island of spies straight out of the sixties TV classic "The Prisoner." Hark stages a clever escape that allows Van Damme and Rodman to face off against the leading world terrorist, a beautifully chiselled, truly menacing Mickey Rourke. (He's just a pair of cloven hoofs away from being a satyr from hell.) At times the film spills deliriously over the top, and it pays little attention to narrative continuity, but that hardly matters. Hark unleashes some hilarious product-placement mayhem having to do with exploding Coke machines—anything goes for that spectacular shot, and he's got a million of 'em.—B.D. (Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

The English Patient—Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, from the novel by Michael Ondaatje, this long and searching movie tangles together a number of stories and characters: Almásy (Ralph Fiennes) and Katharine (Kristin Scott Thomas), who have an affair in North Africa before the Second World War; a French-Canadian nurse (Juliette Binoche) who cares for the badly burned Almásy after the war, and the Sikh soldier (Naveen Andrews) *she* has an affair with; and the mysterious Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe), a scavenging thief who appears to know the secrets of Almásy's past. The triumph of the film lies not just in the force and range of the performances but in Minghella's creation of an intimate epic: vast landscapes mingle with the minute details of desire, and the combination is transfixing.—A.L. (11/25/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Embassy 3, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, New York Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

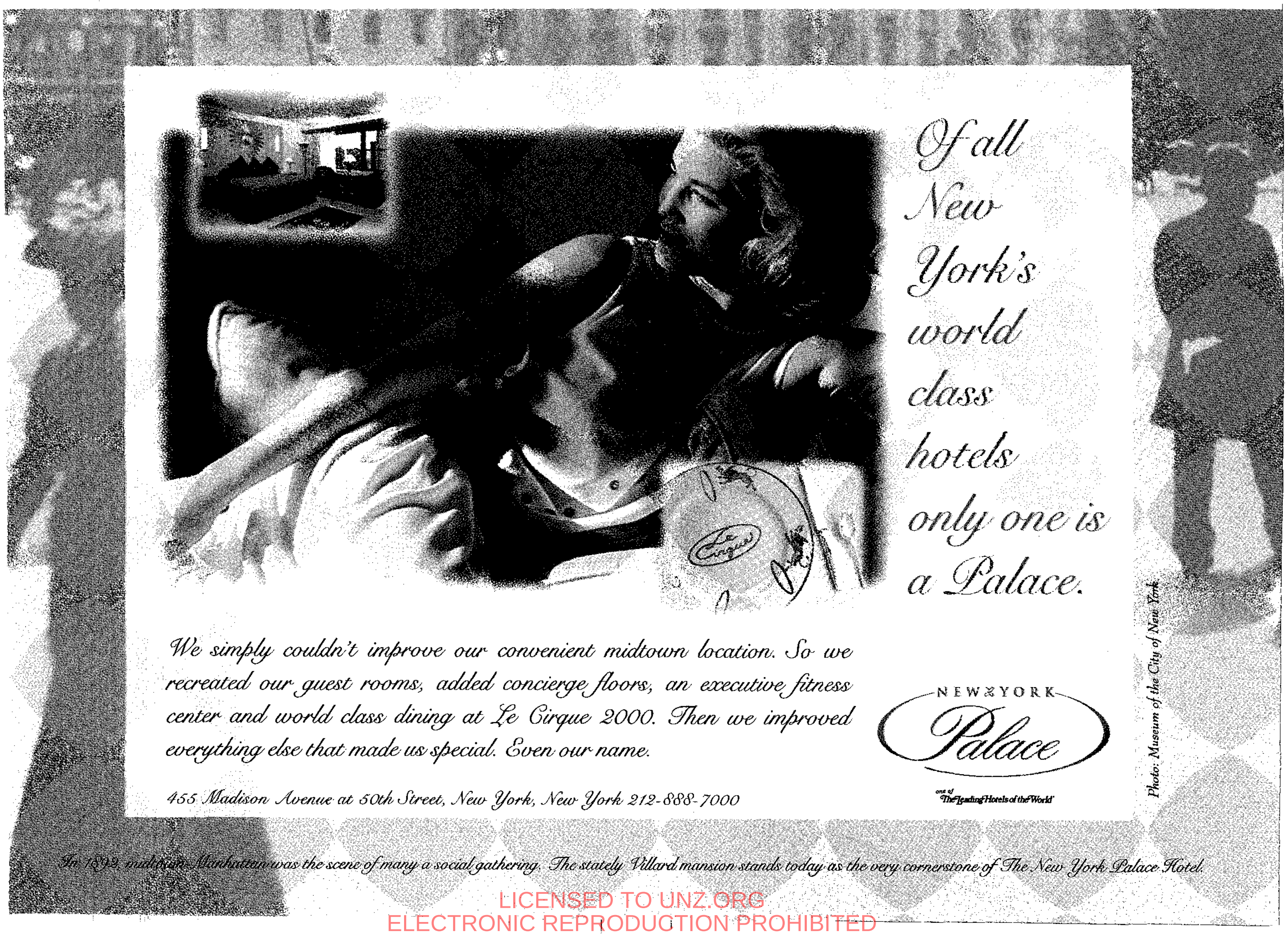
Grosse Pointe Blank—A hit man (John Cusack) returning to his home town for a high-school reunion encounters the girl he left behind (Minnie Driver) and a fellow hit man (Dan Aykroyd) out to kill him, in a comedy directed by George Armitage. With Alan Arkin. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Cinema I, 84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Guild, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

Inventing the Abbotts—Sue Miller's short story, on which Pat O'Connor's quietly directed film is based, is about two working-class brothers in the fifties and their crushes on the rich Abbott sisters. The story deals with the dreams and fantasies that romance brings to young lives, but O'Connor is much more literal-minded: he dresses up the Abbotts in a life too good to be true—they're perfect, like the family in "Meet Me in St. Louis" (except they have sex). The movie sets up minor crises for the characters, but there's not a lot of tension here between rich and poor, just a lot of yearning closeups. Though the director lays out a nice nostalgic table, there's little to feast on beyond the spun-sugar beauty of his cast, which includes Jennifer Connelly, Liv Tyler, Joanna Going, Billy Crudup, and Joaquin Phoenix.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, State, and Village East Cinemas.)

Liar Liar—Tom Shadyac's movie stars Jim Carrey as a lying lawyer whose life is upended when his five-year-old son makes a birthday wish that, for exactly one day, his father will be incapable of telling a lie. As he peels away the layers of venal charm, you wait to discover an even more pungent venality beneath. Instead—guess what—he turns out to be a nice guy, and you feel let down when he finally surrenders to the forces of mush. But it's touching to find a director who believes in all sincerity that jokes about gas and pimples are, and always will be, inherently funny.—A.L. (3/31/97) (Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, National Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, and Waverly.)

Paradise Road—Bruce Beresford wrote and directed this stirring but rather stiff tale of women imprisoned by the Japanese in the Second World War. Beresford is good on the surreal encounter of disaster and politesse: three well-bred women swim to shore from an abandoned ship, stagger through a swamp, and only then introduce themselves, like shy débutantes at a dance. The picture, set mostly in Sumatra, conveys both the horror of the experience and the women's stoicism; as with most prison movies, what you don't get is the sheer sense of time dragging by. Redemption, such as it is, comes from a choir that the prisoners create, which performs scores written down from memory. (All of this, apparently, is drawn from life, and the scores still exist.) The cast, like the prisoners, is an international roundup: Glenn Close, Julianna Margulies, Frances McDormand, Pauline Collins, Jennifer Ehle, Joanna Ter Steege, and Cate Blanchette. You never quite forget what a strict genre the movie belongs to; it can be heartbreaking, but once it's over your heart mends with surprising speed.—A.L. (4/14/97) (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Saint—The history of "The Saint" is one of steady, unspectacular decline, from the original Leslie Charteris novels in the twenties to



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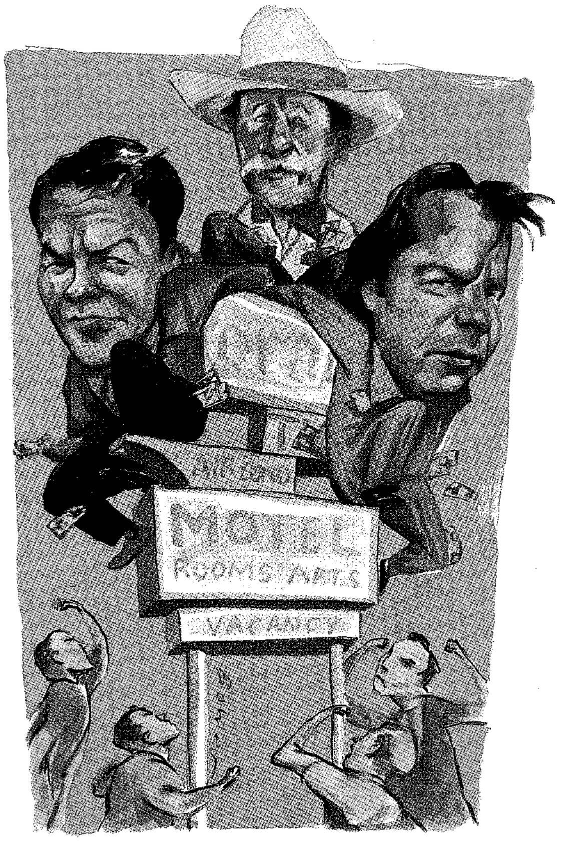
the countless Hollywood adaptations (the best of them starring George Sanders, circa 1940) to the sixties TV series with Roger Moore and, finally, to this splendidly misconceived Phillip Noyce movie. Even the gadgetry is second-rate. Val Kilmer, in the leading role, is fine at negotiating all the camp costume changes, but he can hardly be said to fade into the background, and he remains more weird than suave. As for Elisabeth Shue, she is far too worried and wounded—too serious an actress, in a way—to look as if she might enjoy this nonsense. And what undiluted nonsense it is: Shue plays a cold-fusion scientist whose expertise, compounded by the Saint's courage, may yet save Russia from the evil designs of a Mafia tyrant (Rade Serbedzija). No one has the guts to play it for the laughs that the movie needs; you can feel the agony as the half-jokes die in the air.—A.L. (4/14/97) (Art Greenwich Twin, East 85th Street, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, State, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Sling Blade—Billy Bob Thornton wrote and directed this dunderheaded film, in which he plays a simpleton who, released from an asylum for the criminally insane after serving twenty-five years for the murder of his mother and her lover, returns to his poor Southern home town and ends up befriending a small boy and defending him against *his* mom's abusive boyfriend. Although the film does have two terrific actors—Dwight Yoakam, as the menacing boyfriend, and John Ritter, as a gay store manager—its critical success is mystifying; it's hard to believe that anybody could fall for its dim homilies.—B.D. (Angelika Film Center, Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, 86th Street East Twin, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Murray Hill Cinemas.)

That Old Feeling—Bette Midler and Dennis Farina play off each other well as an older divorced couple who rekindle their romance at their daughter's wedding. The screenplay, by Leslie Dixon, tries hard to recapture the spirit of screwball, but all the trashy talk and the nineties jabs at cosmetic surgery and Rogaine are pretty pedestrian. Farina brings some low-key fun to his lines (as he did in "Get Shorty"), but this is one of Midler's few not-so-great performances. She seems over-wound, strident; instead of enlivening the familiar proceedings, she appears to be pushing everyone out of her way. The film's real surprise is in the performances of two of its co-stars, Paula Marshall, as the daughter, and Danny Nucci, as the hunky paparazzo she falls for at her own wedding. Their sweetness turns cynical jibes into charming banter, and they steer the film to its predictable conclusion as innocently as if it had never been done before. Directed by Carl Reiner.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, National Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th St. East, and Waverly.)

Traveller—Bill Paxton plays an Irish con man in the contemporary rural South who takes young Mark Wahlberg under his wing and teaches him the tricks of his trade. Cinematographer and first-time director Jack Green doesn't race to the finish line; he gives his actors breathing room, and consequently the film develops the unforced, loping pace of a fine Western. Jim McGlynn's script refrains (wisely) from telegraphing the con before it's played, and its attitude toward the two main characters is provocatively conflicted—sometimes they take advantage of people who can't afford to be taken advantage of. These men recall the refreshing amorality of seventies movies: when Paxton meets a straight-arrow single-mom bartender (Julianna Margulies) and tries to fleece her, it's nice to see their chemistry erupt because she likes the con in him. The picture provides a tired motivation for the finale's big score (which seems a little brutal for the story that's preceded it), but Green has captured some fine performances and given his tale a cool, antiheroic zing. Also with James Gammon.—B.D. (Eastside Playhouse, 84th Street Sixplex, and Village Theatre VII; starting April 18.)

When We Were Kings—A foolproof documentary. Then again, it's hard to see how anyone could mess up the story of the 1974 fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman: the drama is all there, ripe for the telling, and the director, Leon Gast, grabs the opportunity with both hands. To maintain the suspense, he enlists help from a wide range of Ali fans: George Plimpton, Spike Lee, and, above all, Norman Mailer, who talks about that night with the unabated excitement of a child.—A.L. (2/17/97) (Carnegie Hall Cinemas and 19th Street East 6.)



Opening April 18, Mark Wahlberg, James Gammon, and Bill Paxton in "Traveller."

TIM BOWER

ALSO PLAYING

DAS BOOT: Village Theatre VII. . . . **BREAKING THE WAVES** (reviewed in our issue of 11/18/96): Film Forum. . . . **CITY OF INDUSTRY** (3/24/97): Embassy 4. . . . **COSÌ:** Chelsea Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, 68th St. Playhouse, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **CRASH** (3/31/97): Angelika Film Center, Criterion Center, Regency, and Sutton. . . . **DANTE'S PEAK:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE DAYTRIPPERS** (3/24/97): Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **DONNIE BRASCO** (3/17/97): Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **FARGO** (3/25/96):Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **GHOSTS OF MISSISSIPPI:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE GODFATHER:** 72nd Street East and State. . . . **GRIND:** Quad Cinema. . . . **HAMLET** (1/13/97): Quad Cinema. . . . **JACKIE CHAN'S FIRST STRIKE:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **JERRY MAGUIRE** (12/16/96): Criterion Center and 64th and 2nd. . . . **JUNGLE**

2 JUNGLE: Embassy 2. . . . **KAMA SUTRA:** Lincoln Square and The Screening Room. . . . **KOLYA:** First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **LOVE AND OTHER CATASTROPHES:** The Screening Room. . . . **LOVE JONES:** Criterion Center and Village Theatre VII. . . . **A MONGOLIAN TALE:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **PINK FLAMINGOS:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **PRISONER OF THE MOUNTAINS:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **PRIVATE PARTS:** Coronet Cinemas. . . . **THE RELIC:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **RETURN OF THE JEDI:** Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Manhattan Twin, and Ziegfeld. . . . **SCHIZOPOLIS:** Cinema Village. . . . **SCREAM:** Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **SECRETS & LIES:** 59th Street East Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema. . . . **SELENA:** Lincoln Square, Olympia, Orpheum VII, State, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **THE SIXTH MAN:** Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Embassy 1, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **SMILLA'S SENSE OF SNOW** (3/10/97): Art Greenwich Twin and Manhattan Twin. . . . **TOUCH:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **TURBO: A POWER RANGERS MOVIE:** Criterion Center. . . . **WAITING FOR GUFFMAN:** Cinema 3 and Village East Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th St.
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy 1, Broadway at 46th St.
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Manhattan Twin, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
National Twin, Broadway at 44th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St.
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
68th St. Playhouse, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

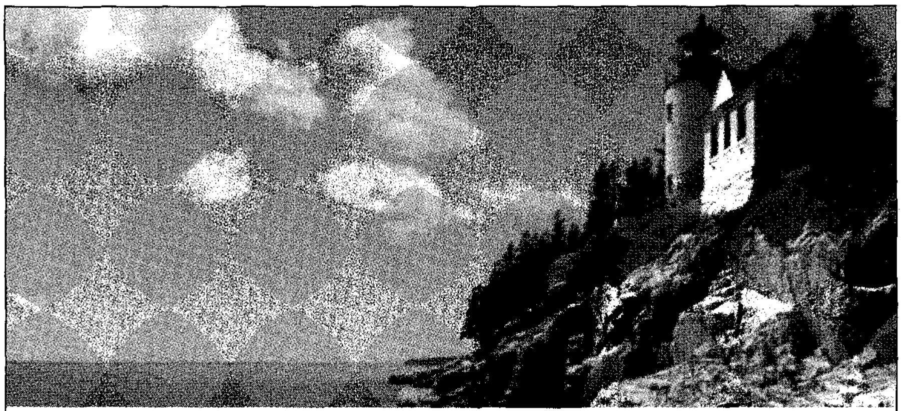
The African Queen (1951)—One of the most charming and entertaining movies ever made. The director, John Huston, has written that the comedy was not present either in the novel by C. S. Forester or in the original screenplay by James Agee, John Collier, and himself, but that it grew out of the relationship of Katharine Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart, who were just naturally funny when they worked together. Hepburn has revealed that the picture wasn't going well until Huston came up with the inspiration that she should think of Rosie as Mrs. Roosevelt. After that, Bogart and Hepburn played together with an ease and humor that makes their love affair—the mating of a forbidding, ironclad spinster and a tough, gin-soaked riverboat captain, in Central Africa in 1914—seem not only inevitable, but perfect.—P.K. (American Museum of the Moving Image; April 20.)

Horror of Dracula (1958; "Dracula")—The blood dripping from a vampire's lips was never more erotic than in Christopher Lee's virile impersonation of Count Dracula. It's unfortunate that this first entry in the series produced by Britain's Hammer Films sacrifices a sense of enveloping horror to B-movie concision (Jimmy Sangster wrote the unimaginative script) and that the director, Terence Fisher, has what can only be called a sledgehammer touch. But the picture does have something: the beginnings of an overripe color scheme that, when combined two years later with a Freudian farrago of sexual terror, would ferment in the same team's "Brides of Dracula." Peter Cushing's vampire hunter, Van Helsing, has his own saturnine charisma; Michael Gough plays Holmwood with a stiff upper face; and Miles Malleson brings a welcome bit of comic relief as an undertaker who jokes about his work.—M.S. (Museum of Modern Art; April 18.)

Nosferatu (1922)—Directed by F. W. Murnau, the original, superbly loathsome German version of Bram Stoker's novel "Dracula" is a concentrated essay in horror fantasy, full of weird, macabre camera effects. Though ludicrous at times (every horror film seems to become absurd after the passage of years, and many before—yet the horror remains), this first important film of the vampire genre has more spectral atmosphere, more ingenuity, and more imaginative ghoulish ghastliness than any of its successors. The movie often seems more closely related to demonic painting than to the later, rather rigid vampire-movie genre. The influence of this film can be seen in movies as disparate as Bergman's "The Magician" (the opening sequences of the coach) and Godard's "Alphaville" (the use of negative film). With Max Schreck as Nosferatu. Silent.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; April 17.)

Ordet (1955)—Kaj Munk's play deals with a modern Resurrection, and Carl Dreyer treats it with extreme literalness. Some of us may find it difficult to accept the holy-madman protagonist (driven insane by too close study of Kierkegaard!), and even more difficult to accept Dreyer's use of the protagonist's home as a stage set for numerous entrances and exits, and altogether impossible to get involved in the factional strife between bright, happy Christianity and dark, gloomy Christianity—represented as they are by people sitting around drinking vast quantities of coffee. In Danish.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; April 21.)

The Party (1968)—Peter Sellers plays a bungling actor from New Delhi who accidentally blows up an expensive Hollywood set. Intending to blacklist him, the studio head writes his name down on a slip of paper; a secretary assumes that the name is to be added to a party guest list, and so the actor arrives at the home of the studio head who wants to kill him. It's a promising beginning—too promising for what follows. Most of this Blake Edwards slapstick farce records the way the Indian innocently destroys the party, and it's too long for its



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one-note jokes, and often too obvious to be really funny.—P.K. (A Different Light Bookstore; April 20.)

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

FILM FORUM 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—"Woman in the Dunes" (1964, Hiroshi Teshigahara; in Japanese).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—April 17 at 2:30: "Passover Fever" (1995, Shemi Zarhin; in Hebrew), with Gila Almagor. . . . ¶ April 17 at 3 and 6: "Amazon Journal" (1996, Geoffrey O'Connor), a documentary. . . . ¶ In celebration of the centenary of the publication of Bram Stoker's "Dracula," the museum is showing forty of the vampire's many incarnations. April 17 at 6: "Vampir" (1970, Pedro Portabella). . . . April 17 at 8: "Nosferatu" (†). . . . April 18 at 2:30 and April 20 at 5: "Dracula" (1931, George Melford; in Spanish, with no English subtitles). . . . April 18 at 6 and April 20 at 3: "Dracula" (1931, Tod Browning). . . . April 18 at 8: "Horror of Dracula" (†). . . . April 19 at 1 and April 22 at 2:30: "Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein" (1948, Charles T. Barton). . . . April 19 at 3: "Son of Dracula" (1943, Robert Siodmak). . . . April 19 at 5: "Dracula's Daughter" (1936, Lambert Hillyer). . . . April 20 at 1 and April 21 at 2:30: "El Vampiro" (1958, Fernando Mendez; in Spanish, with no English subtitles). . . . April 21 at 6: "Kuroneko" (1968, Kaneto Shindo; in Japanese) and "Kwaidan" (1965, Masaki Kobayashi; in Japanese). . . . April 22 at 6: "Vampires in Havana" (1985, Juan Padrón; in Spanish), an animated comedy film. . . . ¶ Films directed by Ernst Lubitsch and set in Paris, or referring to it. April 18 at 8: "So This Is Paris" (1926; silent, with French intertitles). . . . April 19 at 3: "Ninotchka" (1939). . . . April 19 at 5: "The Love Parade" (1929). . . . ¶ April 20 at 2:30: "Pull My Daisy" (1959, Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie) and three short films by Rose Bond. . . . ¶ April 20 at 5: "Prisoners of War" (1995, Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi), a documentary.

WALTER READE THEATRE, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A program of Danish films; most in Danish, with English subtitles. April 17 at 2, April 18 at 2 and 7, and April 19 at 7: "Karen Blixen: Storyteller" (1995, Christian Braad Thomsen). . . . April 18 at 4 and April 19 at 8:45: "Hamsun" (1996, Jan Troell). . . . April 18 at 8:45: "Pusher" (1996, Nikolas Winding Refn). . . . April 19 at 4 and April 21 at 8:30: "Søren Kierkegaard" (1994, Anne Regitze Wivel). . . . April 20 at 4 and April 21 at 4:30: "Images of Relief" (1982, Lars Von Trier; no English subtitles). . . . April 20 at 5:30: "The Kingdom" (1994, Von Trier). . . . April 21 at 2 and 6: "Ordet" (†). . . . April 22 at 2 and 7: "Babette's Feast" (1988, Gabriel Axel; in Danish and French). . . . April 22 at 4 and 9: "Just a Girl" (1995, Peter Schrøder). . . . ¶ Weekend showings for children. April 19-20 at 2: "Otto Is a Rhino" (1983, Rumle Hammerich).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Through April 21: The 3rd Avignon/New York Film Festival 97, French and American independent films (including film tributes to Marcel Carné, Richard Brooks, and John Sayles), seminars, and discussions. . . . ¶ April 22 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Daybreak" (1939, Marcel Carné; in French).

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of films starring Humphrey Bogart. April 19 at 2: "Key Largo" (1948, John Huston). . . . April 19 at 4: "In a Lonely Place" (1950, Nicholas Ray). . . . April 20 at 2: "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre" (1948, Huston). . . . April 20 at 4:30: "The African Queen" (†).

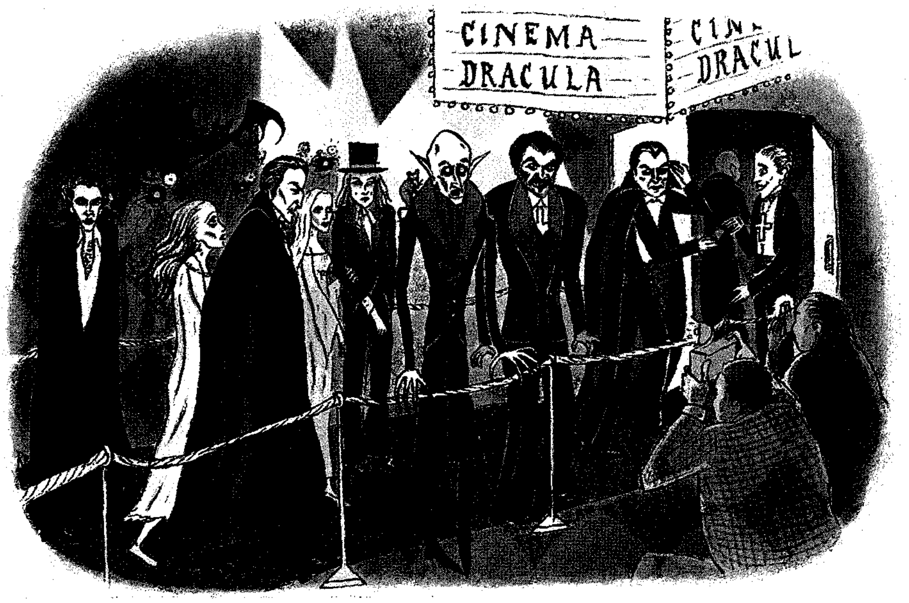
SYMPHONY SPACE, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—A series of musical films, each preceded by a short cabaret performance featuring music associated with the film's creators. April 22 at 7:30: Melba Joyce will sing songs with lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, followed by "Carmen Jones" (1954, Otto Preminger), with Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Films by Luis Buñuel. April 16 at 6: "Gran Casino" (1946). . . . April 16 at 9 and April 17 at 6: "The Phantom of Liberty" (1974). . . . April 17 at 8 and 10: "L'Age d'Or" (1930) and "Un Chien Andalou" (1929). . . . ¶ April 17 at 7, April 19-20 at 4, and April 21-22 at 7: "The Kingdom" (1994, Lars Von Trier). . . . ¶ April 18 at 6: "Nanook of the North" (1922, Robert Flaherty). . . . ¶ April 18 at 8 and 10, April 19-20 at 4 and 8, and April 21-22 at 9: "To Have or Not" (1995, Laetitia Masson). . . . ¶ April 22 at 7: "Man of Aran" (1934, Flaherty).

A DIFFERENT LIGHT BOOKSTORE, 151 W. 19th St.—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On April 20 at 7, the feature will be "The Party" (†).

ANGELIKA 57, 225 W. 57th St.—April 16-19 at 7:30: Short films by students of Columbia University's School of the Arts. (For information, call 854-1547.)

CINEMA VILLAGE, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363)—From April 18: A program of twenty-eight Scopitones, mini-musicals seen in coin-operated jukebox-type machines during the sixties.



At MOMA, the many faces of Dracula.

ROXANNA BIKADOROFF

Jazz from coast to coast

Sonny Stitt did a peerless Dizzy tribute . . . scat vocalist Babs Gonzales teased riffs from baritone sax great Cecil Payne and pianist Harold Mabern . . . Phil Woods, Stan Getz, Gerry Mulligan, the Paul Jeffrey Octet, the Vic Dickenson All-Stars, slipped from one golden groove to another. It was two years after the Newport Jazz Festival® moved to New York . . . But 1974, in particular, was a summer of magic for this writer.

Kudos go to jazz impresario and godfather George Wein. For six of the twelve days Newport New York was in town, the fest was camped at Fordham University's Pope Auditorium on West 60th Street. And knowing that when the day's classes were a wrap, I could rush off to these free afternoon concerts each day was like being a kid who just found out Ringling Brothers had pitched its Big Top in her backyard. It's a memory that will linger for a lifetime. Today, the beat goes on with forty-five concert events at thirty venues from midtown to Harlem, not counting the participation of twenty New York City clubs . . . An eight-day jazz party in celebration of the festival's twenty-five years in Gotham.

In the pages ahead, we sample from the more than two hundred annual stateside fests that honor jazz as a thriving American institution—an art form that arguably reaches the broadest audience of any music category. From next week's New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival to the summertime JVC Festival New York to the venerable Newport and Monterey fests—jazz belongs to America.

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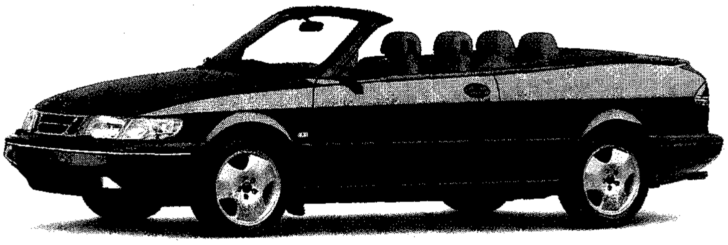

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notes on newport

Hard as it may be to imagine Newport without jazz—or, for that matter, jazz without the Newport Jazz Festival—such times did indeed exist. Prior to 1954, this city on the Rhode Island coast was best known as a summer enclave for the upper class. Then producer George Wein pitched a temporary music shell on the grounds of the Newport Casino, mixed and matched jazz giants from all eras, and turned Newport into a haven for swing.

Over the next two decades, the Newport Festival became the flagship summer jazz extravaganza, the definitive locale for merging sun and sounds. Careers were made and reinvigorated, classic live albums were recorded, generations of musicians and listeners joined together as music poured forth. Still, there was often an uneasy peace between the festival and the local community. In an era when concerts were interrupted by college students engaging in "beer riots," and when the presence of crossover acts from the world of rock generated hordes of gate-crashers, local authorities shut the festival down on three occasions, and in 1971 banished it entirely. Wein took his troops to Manhattan for an extravaganza that ultimately became the JVC Jazz Festival and continued the Newport tradition with spinoff festivals all over the world.

The tradition was reestablished in 1984 when Newport asked Wein to bring the festival back. As it moves deeper into its second decade, the revived Newport Jazz Festival is essentially unchanged. It continues to mix tradition and innovation, to expand jazz's repertoire with an infusion of related musics, and to keep elegance and informality in a fine balance.

Tradition at Newport means the Newport Casino-International Tennis Hall of Fame, site of the original 1954 festival and now home of the Friday night concert that kicks off the city's jazz weekend. This year, it also means a tribute to the late Dizzy Gillespie. This trumpet immortal and modern jazz innovator was the hit of the Newport Jazz Festival's very first evening on July 17, 1954. Gillespie's quintet roused a subdued crowd with a beautiful reading of the ballad "My Man," and he jammed on "I Got Rhythm" with a group that included fellow trumpeters Wild Bill Davison and Bobby Hackett, as well as the unlikely pairing of Eddie Condon and Stan Kenton in the rhythm section. Gillespie returns to the Newport Casino in spirit this year, saluted by trumpeters from three generations: Nicholas Payton, one of the leading "young lions"; Jon Faddis, heir to Gillespie's explosive upper-register conception; and Clark Terry, who first visited Newport with the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1956 (making him this year's most venerable Newport alumnus).

That initial appearance by the Ellingtonians produced Paul Gonsalves' classic tenor sax solo on "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue," a performance that landed Ellington on the cover of *Time* magazine and returned his band to the top of the jazz heap. If the album that documented the triumph, *Ellington at Newport*, is the most famous that the festival has produced, second-place honors go to the set Ray Charles taped two years later (now available on the Atlantic CD, *Ray Charles Live*). Bringing this yet-to-be-anointed genius to Newport was a risky move at the time; but then it was the 1958 festival (with Mahalia Jackson, Big Maybelle, and Chuck Berry) that led jazz purists to complain that Newport was drifting away from *real* jazz. Charles proceeded to silence the nitpickers with a set equally balanced between driving instrumentals in the hard-bop mold and his own sanctified soul vocals. His scheduled appearance this year, headlining the Saturday afternoon concert at Fort Adams State Park, is one more reminder of Charles' supremacy.

HOTEL VIKING
HOTEL VIKING

Genre-stretching continues at Newport, along with the introduction of younger artists who are destined to chart jazz's future. This year, that means the Newport debuts of Medeski Martin and Wood (Saturday afternoon) and Don Byron (Sunday afternoon). Keyboardist John Medeski, drummer Billy Martin, and bassist Chris Wood are a trio who have paid equal attention to alternative rock and experimental jazz. Their avant-garde, deep-pocket groove music, honed by extensive touring that has brought them to dance clubs as well as jazz rooms, has created an underground network of loyalists as ardent as those who follow The Grateful Dead or Phish. Byron, the most innovative clarinetist to emerge in the last twenty years, likes to work outside the mainstream as well. An artist who incorporates Afro-Latin percussion and poetry into his own original compositions, anything might be found on Byron's musical agenda, where the only constants are superlative musicianship and daring.

Last year saw two more innovations at Newport—the docking of the QE2's jazz cruise during the festival, and a Saturday night jam on the roof of the Hotel Viking. Both features will be continued this year, with Al Jarreau, Danilo Pérez, and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band among those disembarking with the ship's passengers. Catching the sounds at Fort Adams State Park from the deck of a boat in Newport harbor has become one more part of the festival's tradition. Still, most of us want to take in Newport the old-fashioned way, with feet on the ground, bodies bobbing, and spirits soaring.

Bob Blumenthal is a regular contributor to *The Boston Globe, Fi, and Jazziz.*

notes on new orleans

Civic pride aside, it's no exaggeration to say that New Orleans and South Louisiana constitute one of the world's great musical regions. Music is literally *in* the air, in melodious puffs of steam released by riverboat calliopes, and at street parades, jazz funerals, Mardi Gras "Indian" gatherings, zydeco trail rides, and festivals that celebrate every conceivable occasion.

While virtually all musical styles flourish in South Louisiana, several seminal genres have especially deep roots in the cultural landscape. Jazz took some of its most crucial evolutionary steps in New Orleans, enhanced by a unique convergence of African, Caribbean, and European traditions, and forged by pioneer trumpeters Buddy Bolden, King Oliver, and Louis Armstrong; pianist Jelly Roll Morton; and clarinetist Sidney Bechet. Today, cultural-activist musicians such as clarinetist Dr. Michael White and trumpeter Greg Stafford lead a generation of younger players who imbue the old sound with fresh, timeless passion.

During the past fifteen years, the venerable New Orleans style has seen some radical changes in rhythm and content, incorporating everything from rap and be-bop to TV-sitcom theme songs. These new influences were introduced by The Dirty Dozen Brass Band, and this sound is maintained today by groups such as ReBirth. Some purists feel that these contemporary brass bands are defiling a sacred legacy, while advocates opine that the infusion of fresh blood has revitalized a dying tradition. Aesthetic debates aside, the brass band resurgence has created unprecedented opportunities for young musicians within the New Orleans black community.

Cover: text, Angela Gaudioso; illustration, John Jinks; *this page clockwise:* Newport's Viking hotel, site of this year's rooftop jam; innovator Don Byron © Kathy Chapman; Paul Gonsalves in the midst of his famed 27-chorus solo in 1956, courtesy of Festival Productions; the Duke Ellington Orchestra © Teppei Inoguchi; Nicholas Payton.

New Orleans also supports an active modern jazz scene with nationally recognized local luminaries including trumpeter Nicholas Payton, saxophonist Wessell Anderson, and drummer Johnny Vidacovich. The patriarch of the local scene, pianist and educator Ellis Marsalis, helped launch a jazz program at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts; Marsalis' sons Wynton and Branford are among the graduates of this stellar high school.

Rhythm and blues reached a creative peak in New Orleans during the fifties and early sixties, a fertile Golden Age that began when hometown hero Fats Domino topped the national charts. Domino's sound was so popular that major labels began sending national stars such as Little Richard to record hits with Crescent City session players. Another seminal figure in R. & B. was the late pianist and singer Professor Longhair, whose Afro-Cuban rhumba style underscores New Orleans' cultural connection with the Caribbean.

Today New Orleans R. & B. is still thriving. Several stars from the fifties remain in fine form, including Domino and Frankie Ford. So do a host of greats who first emerged in the sixties, such as Allen Toussaint, Dr. John, and Irma Thomas. A contemporary cutting edge is maintained by The Neville Brothers and the third-generation artistry of Davell Crawford.

Cajun music and its black-Creole counterpart, zydeco, are unique factors in the South Louisiana scene. Cajun/zydeco activity is centered around the cultural enclave of Lafayette, some two hours west of New Orleans. There is much in common between the two styles; both feature the accordion as the dominant instrument, both are sung primarily in French, and both make people *dance.* However, Cajun music is influenced by Anglo-American country music, and the term Cajun usually refers to white bands; zydeco typically denotes black bands, and reflects the influence of R. & B., blues, and soul. Today's prominent Cajun artists include BeauSoleil, Steve Riley, and D.L. Menard; zydeco godfather Boozoo Chavis rules a scene that's enriched by Stanley "Buckwheat" Dural, Geno Delafose, and Nathan Williams. The Lafayette area is also a center for Gulf Coast swamp-pop, an especially soulful expression of fifties and sixties R. & B. epitomized by Phil Phillips' poignant "Sea of Love."

To sample this great music all at once, attend the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival next week. Now in its twenty-eighth season, this annual rite of spring presents twelve concurrent performance areas featuring the best of South Louisiana's musical treasures. Or, if time allows, take a leisurely vacation in and around Lafayette and New Orleans, and soak up the heady blend of sounds, sights, and tastes. The wealth of options amply justifies the description of South Louisiana's music scene as "an embarrassment of riches."

Ben Sandmel plays drums with The Hackberry Ramblers, contributes to *Esquire, Rolling Stone, Musician, Live!,* and others, and is a folklore researcher for the state of Louisiana.

silver notes: a retrospective

BY DAN MORGENSTERN

Twenty-five years ago rock ruled the roost and jazz was an endangered species. But the Newport fest, banned from Rhode Island, made its New York debut without apologies, entering the arena with the confidence of a winner. For nine days running, the festival dominated the city's musical life. Daily double-headers (two at five and two at nine) were held at Carnegie and Philharmonic halls. Concertgoers making their way from one hall to the other passed friends moving in the opposite direction and were left wondering if they had chosen the right order. Two midnight jam sessions took place at Radio City Music Hall, each featuring thirty stellar performers. At the second jam, Charles Mingus played one of the greatest bass solos of his life. Two big-name jazz and soul concerts were held at Yankee Stadium. A boatride up the Hudson offered genuine New Orleans jazz. The bands of Count Basie and Sy Oliver played a midnight dance at The Commodore Hotel (Basie kept the floor crowded). Afternoon "Connoisseur Concerts" had fare ranging from Eubie Blake to Cecil Taylor. There were daily showings of rare jazz films, seminars at Lincoln Center, and a Sunday morning concert at Radio City that in effect was a rousing capsule history of gospel.

The city's response to this unprecedented musical cornucopia was enthusiastic, with large proportions of young faces in the audiences. "We had to show that jazz could stand by itself," said Newport founding father George Wein recently when looking back on a quarter century of jazz in New York. "That was the most important single thing. Rock had become an overshadowing presence, but with the help of all the attention from the media, we made jazz visible once again."

And viable. (Wein is quick to point out that it would not have been possible without corporate sponsorship.) What began as Newport-in-New York became the Kool Jazz Festival in 1980 and has been the JVC Jazz Festival New York since 1986.

Yet after the passing of most of the jazz superstars, who could be counted on to fill large halls on the strength of their names, it became clear that merely assembling groups of musicians on stage was not enough. Moreover, both jazz audiences and jazz artists were becoming increasingly aware of the music's rich history. The festival responded with special programs, often produced by noted jazz musicians and critics. Many of these took the form of tributes, a concept pioneered by The New York Jazz Repertory Company (founded by Wein in 1973). Drawing from a pool of versatile players, and with a quadrumvirate of artistic directors (all musicians), the company presented impressive retrospectives of the music of such diverse figures as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and John Coltrane. The NYJRC did not prosper—it was an idea ahead of its time. But tribute concerts became a permanent feature of the festival, there've been many memorable ones. Among them, salutes to Benny Carter, Illinois Jacquet, and to trumpeter Doc Cheatham on the occasion of his eighty-sixth birthday, in 1991. And there were the tributes to songwriters, jointly produced by Mel Tormé and the late Gerry Mulligan. The latter is prominent on the long list of festival luminaries now sorely missed.

There will be no more encores for Ella Fitzgerald or Sarah Vaughan. Bill Evans and Stan Getz won't be around to instruct the sound crew at Carnegie Hall to turn off all the mikes—these two, alone among their peers, were eager to let that famous hall prove its unamplified mettle. Duke Ellington won't tell us again that he loves us madly. Nor will Count Basie ask his band to reprise the ending to "April in Paris" one more time.

But jazz survives because it is a living music, and the good news is that so many gifted new players, singers, and writers have emerged during the quarter century of this festival's tenure. Like the music, the festival is continuously reinventing itself. There is the old saying among artists (but not unique to them) that you haven't made it until you've made it in New York. The festival, it seems safe to say, did just that.

Six-time Grammy winner Dan Morgenstern is the director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, the former editor of *Down Beat,* and author of "Jazz People."

CITY
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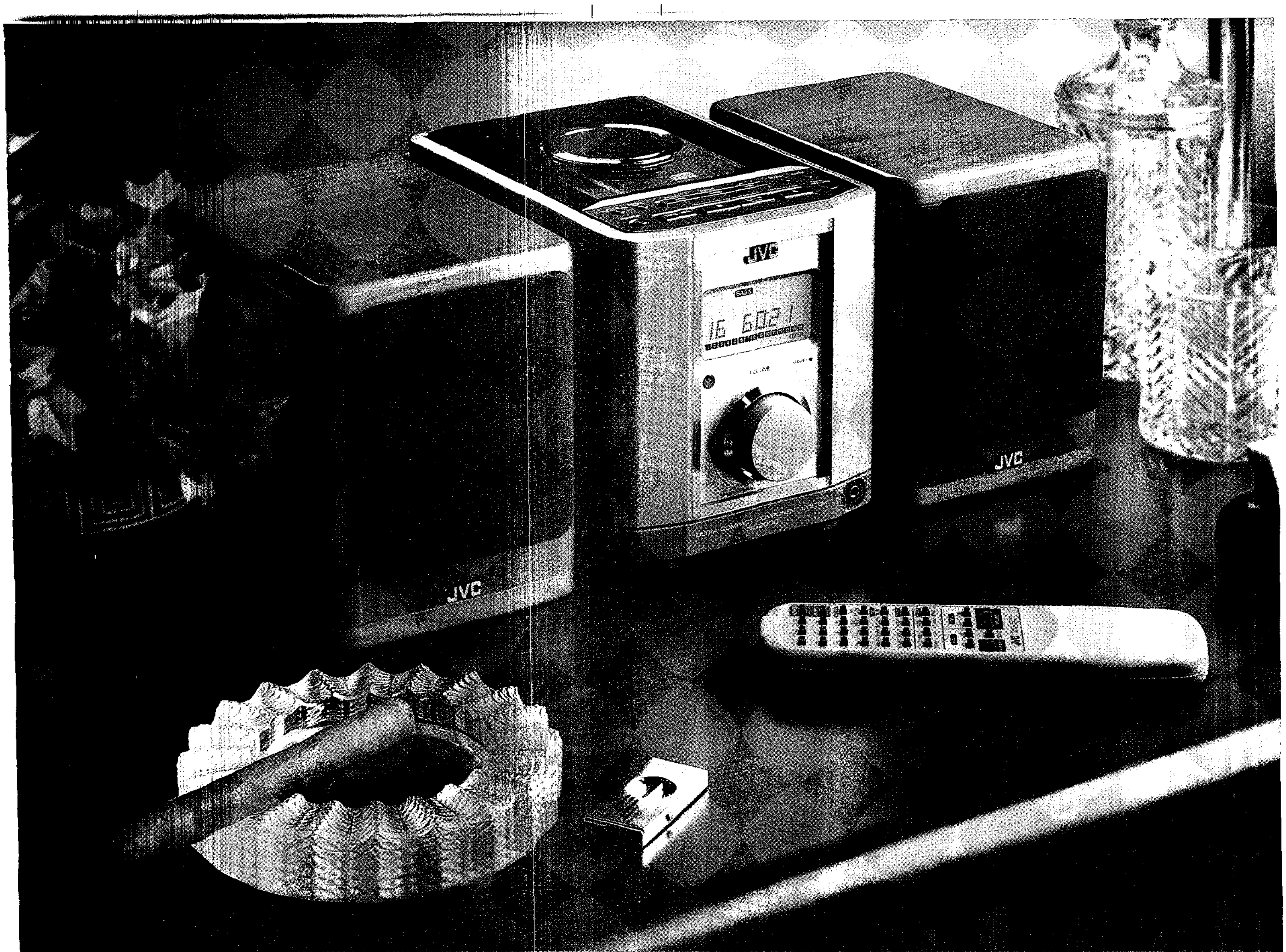
RADIO

photos clockwise: New Orleans fest fairgrounds scenery; Allen Toussaint; Dr. John in "the right place" © Girard M. Mouton III; Radio City Music Hall exterior © Toru Tanaka; the late, first lady of song Ella Fitzgerald © David Redfern; profile of "The Count."



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State of the art

BY LEE JESKE

What do you call it when a twenty-two year old singer who sounds astonishingly like Billie Holiday opens her debut album with Patsy Cline's hit "Walkin' After Midnight," backed by jazz's freshest young saxophonist, James Carter, and Tom Waits' guitarist, Marc Ribot?

Jazz?

Or what do you call Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" and U2's "Love Is Blindness" when they're done in deep, sultry versions by today's hottest jazz vocalist?

Standards?

If you're Madeleine Peyroux and Cassandra Wilson, you step back and leave the definitions to others. Which, in discussing the state of jazz in 1997, is not such a bad idea.

For the first sixty years of its recorded history, jazz was a straight arrow of innovation: traditional jazz to swing to bebop to cool jazz to hard bop to modal jazz to free jazz to fusion—whooooooosh!

Then, twenty years ago, fusion seemed at a dead end and free jazz had taken instrumental exploration to its limit. At that juncture a group of fusion pioneers—Herbie Hancock, Freddie Hubbard, Wayne Shorter, Tony Williams, and Ron Carter—formed V.S.O.P. to get back to mainstream jazz, and a number of avant-gardists, including Anthony Braxton, Air, and Arthur Blythe, began recording "in the tradition."

And along came bebop tenor saxophone giant Dexter Gordon (in a heralded homecoming from Europe); along came Wynton Marsalis and the rest of the "young lions" to dig into what came to be called "classic jazz"; along came the reissue boom which put Jelly Roll Morton on the shelf next to Weather Report; along came, finally, the acceptance in America that jazz was indeed worthy of corporate grants and Lincoln Center constituencies.

photos clockwise: chanteuse Madeleine Peyroux © Charlie Pizzarello; V.S.O.P.'s Hancock, Shorter, Carter, and Williams © Nobao Hayashi; Cassandra Wilson © David Mayenfisch; Joe Lovano © Jimmy Katz.

In 1997, exactly eighty years since the Original Dixieland Jazz Band made its first jazz record, if there is one jazz trend worth noting it's the breaking down of barriers between jazz and other musical genres. Jazz—traditionally abused and misunderstood in America—is stepping out of the shadows, shedding its xenophobia and rooting around in mainstream standards.

And jazz's digging doesn't stop at pop. Classical music—which jazz has always regarded with suspicion—is rife for exploration. Wynton Marsalis has been experimenting with classical-like extended compositional forms. Next year, Marsalis and The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center will tour a program pairing Igor Stravinsky's "L'Histoire du Soldat" with a new Marsalis jazz composition for precisely the same instrumentation.

festival listings sampler

New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival
April 25-May 4 *504.522.4786*
Mellon PSFS Jazz Festival/Philadelphia
June 13-22 *610.667.3559*
Playboy Jazz Festival/Hollywood Bowl
June 14-15 *310.449.4070*
***The* Texaco New York Jazz Festival**
June 17-30 *212.219.3006*
JVC Jazz Festival New York
June 20-28 *212.501.1390*
Newport Jazz Festival® at Saratoga
June 28-29 *518.587.3330*
JVC Jazz Festival/Chicago Navy Pier
July 24-27 *312.559.1212*
Fujitsu Concord Jazz Festival/Concord, CA
July 26-27 *510.671.3100*
QE2 Cruise - Newport Jazz Festival at Sea
New York/St. John/Newport/New York
August 13-18 *800.5.CUNARD*
JVC Jazz Festival/Newport, R.I.
August 15-17 *401.847.3700*
Monterey Jazz Festival
September 19-21 *800.307.3378*
San Francisco Jazz Festival
October 22-November 2 *415.398.5655*

Tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano has recorded his "Rush Hour" and "Celebrating Sinatra" albums with classical chamber music instrumentation. On her debut album, his wife, vocalist Judi Silvano, has Ravel and Rachmaninoff themes side-by-side with those of Monk and Ellington. Brad Mehldau's rich classical background informs his beautiful piano trio music, while classical vocalist Frederica Von Stade's latest album celebrates the writing of Dave Brubeck.

And jazz's own classical music is being reinvigorated with the growth of the repertory movement.

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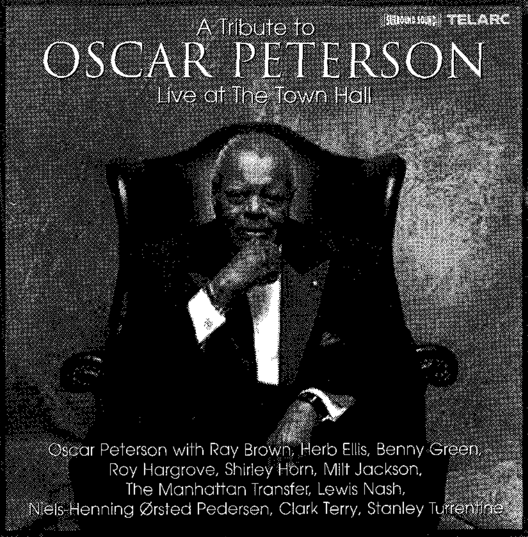

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Musicians gathered Oct. 1, 1996 at Manhattan's Town Hall for a live-recorded performance to salute the more than five decades of musical contributions by pianist Oscar Peterson. Oscar performs with old friends guitarist Herb Ellis, bassist Ray Brown (from the original 1958 Oscar Peterson Trio), Benny Green, Roy Hargrove, Shirley Horn, Milt Jackson, Lewis Nash, Manhattan Transfer, Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, and Stanley Turrentine.

"I've been loving him all my life. Early on in school I studied Rachmaninoff. In my teen years I discovered Oscar. He is my Rachmaninoff. He is everything to me."—Shirley Horn

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The Carnegie Hall Jazz Band, for example, routinely hires such contemporary composers as Maria Schneider to rework jazz classics. Musicians are busily reinvestigating the jazz canon, as pianist Chick Corea (with twentysomething saxophonist Joshua Redman and seventysomething drummer Roy Haynes) does Bud Powell; alto saxophonist Kenny Garrett (with guitarist Pat Metheny) does John Coltrane, and the Manhattan Transfer does Fletcher Henderson and other Swing Era bigwigs.

Soul jazz, which flourished in the nineteen-sixties, is being reconstituted by hip-hop deejays as "acid jazz." Today's dance floors are thumping to the sounds of Incognito and funky old sixties records by the likes of Cannonball Adderley and Horace Silver. The old organ trio sound is being revisited by such contemporary artists as Medeski Martin and Wood, Larry Goldings, and Wayne Horvitz.

Ethnic and world musics are also getting blended into jazz's stew. Cuban music, always important, is getting a new sizzle with the loosening of restrictions that have kept Cuban greats such as pianist Chucho Valdés from entering the States. Brazilian music is still pricking up ears (most recently in trumpeter Terence Blanchard's collaboration with singer-composer Ivan Lins). Reggae is being explored by Ernest Ranglin and Monty Alexander; African music by Randy Weston (in a recent collaboration with the Gnawa Musicians of Morocco) and Joe Zawinul (who recorded with Mali superstar Salif Keita).

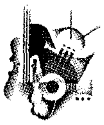
So for those who wonder what Patsy Cline and Hank Williams songs are doing on the most popular jazz vocal albums of late, consider July 16, 1930. Jimmie Rodgers, the father of country music, recorded his classic "Blue Yodel No. 9" backed by two musicians: Louis Armstrong on trumpet and Lil Hardin Armstrong on piano.

The question is not, "Why jazz and country music (or jazz and anything else)?" The question, these days, is, "Why not?"

Critics' Choice: new CDs of note

- **A Tribute to Oscar Peterson: Live at Town Hall**/ *Telarc Records*
- **Another Time, Another Place**
  Benny Carter & Phil Woods
  Evening Star
- **Calling Berlin, Vol. II**
  Ruby Braff and Ellis Larkins/ *Arbors*
- **The New Orleans Night Crawlers**
  Rounder Records
- **Doc Cheatham-Nicholas Payton**
  Verve Records
- **Tactics** (John Abercrombie, Dan Wall, Adam Nussbaum)/ *ECM Records*
- **RCA Victor 80th Anniversary Sampler, & Vol. 1 1917-1929** *(first of eight series)*
- **The "Kansas City" Sessions by Lester Young** (reissue, 1938)/ *Commodore*

Lee Jeske has written extensively about jazz and popular music since 1975. His articles have appeared in *The New York Times, Rolling Stone, Down Beat, The London Sunday Times,* and others.



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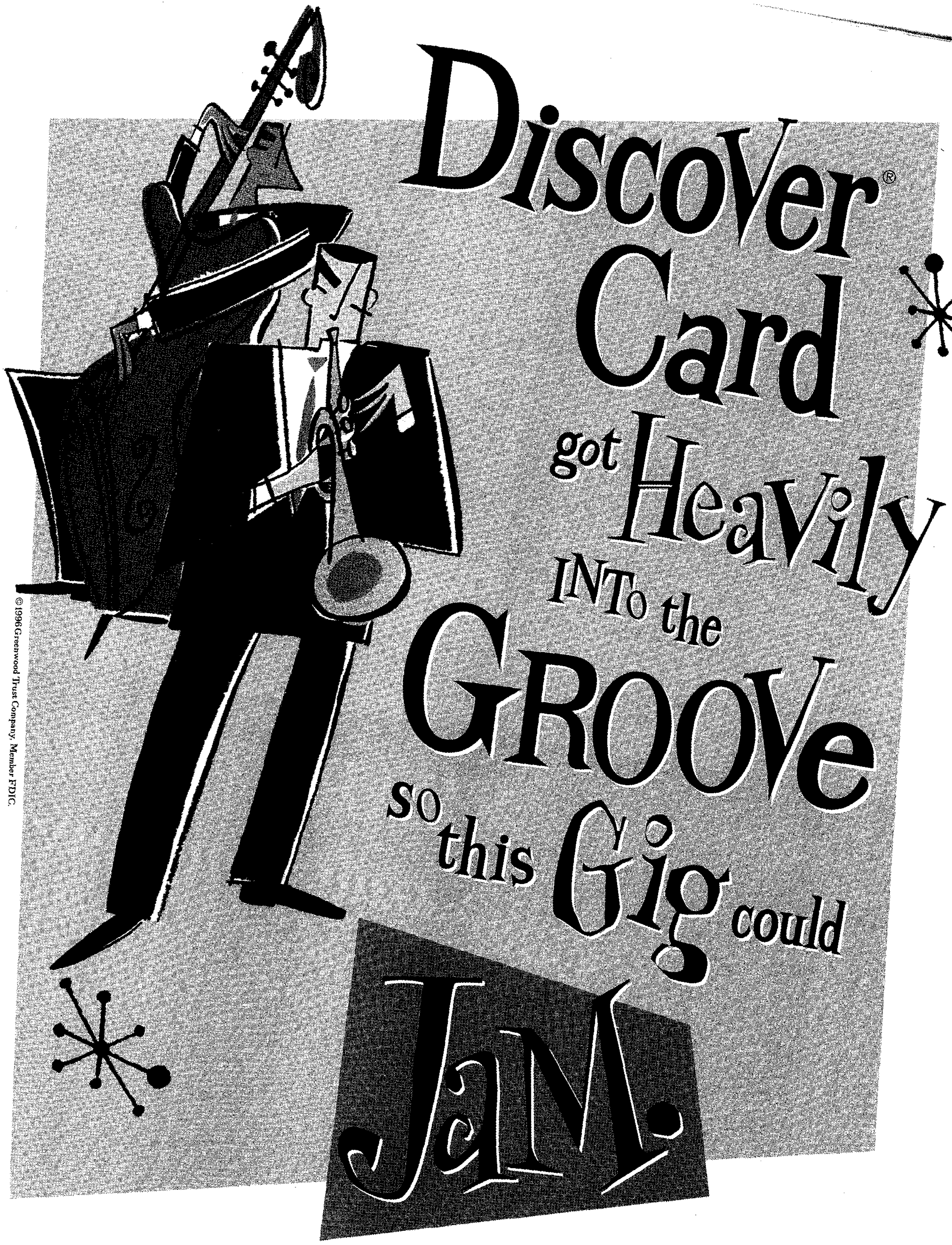

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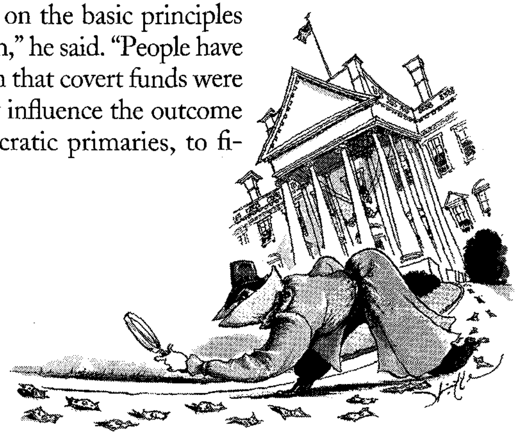
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

SECRET SERVICE

The other day, Terry F. Lenzner was musing about comparisons between Watergate and the political scandals of the Clinton era. Framed on the wall opposite his desk was the subpoena he had served to obtain the Nixon tapes, twenty-three years ago, but Lenzner, who was then deputy chief counsel to the Senate Watergate committee, saw few parallels between that occupant of the White House and the current one. "So far, the President's troubles don't come close to an attack on the basic principles of the Constitution," he said. "People have probably forgotten that covert funds were used to negatively influence the outcome of the '72 Democratic primaries, to finance the plumbers' group that harassed Nixon's enemies. If you look back at Watergate, there are a multitude of examples to suggest that what we've seen to date with Clinton's Presidency doesn't rise to that level."



Lenzner's recollections are especially notable because he is now the founder and chairman of Investigative Group International, a blue-chip Washington-based detective agency that, according to highly placed Party sources, has been hired by the Democratic National Committee to look into the questionable donors who contributed to the President's reëlection efforts. Although the Democrats have announced the return of many of those donations and made noises about internal reforms, they apparently don't want anyone to know that they brought in Lenzner's firm last December to help clean up the mess. The D.N.C.'s general counsel, Joseph Sandler, says he won't "confirm or deny" that the Party has retained I.G.I., and neither will Lenzner, who pleads professional confidentiality.

Headquartered in an anonymously modern building on Connecticut Avenue, I.G.I. has snooped for such well-heeled clients as Teddy Kennedy, the Beatles, Ivana Trump, the United Way of America, and Goldman, Sachs. In April of 1996, the agency was hired by the Clintons' legal-defense fund to investigate the origins of a suspicious parcel of money orders. It turned out that the now notorious Chinese-American businessman Yah Lin (Charlie) Trie was funnelling more than six hundred thousand dollars into the fund—money raised from questionable sources, including a Taiwan-based Buddhist sect. Guided partly by the I.G.I. report, the fund last summer returned all the money linked to Trie—which didn't stop him from diverting more money into Democratic coffers. When D.N.C. officials realized that they needed similar assistance, I.G.I. was an obvious choice—particularly since Lenzner had helped trace millions in illegal contributions to the 1972 Nixon campaign.

The fact that the Democrats are keeping quiet about the role of I.G.I. and Lenzner in their housecleaning may reflect worries that the news will scare off prospective donors. Or it may be that the Democrats want to avoid public association with a service that, as one of Lenzner's colleagues has said ruefully, "still has a kind of smell about it." There was more than a whiff of bad publicity last year, when it was reported that the tobacco giant Brown & Williamson had hired I.G.I. to dig up dirt on a whistle-blowing former employee.

If Lenzner is asked to testify before the Senate committee that is looking into the Democrats' fund-raising abuses, he will find himself facing questions from someone who also made a name for himself in the old scandal. The hearings will be chaired by Senator Fred Thompson, of Tennessee, who entered public life as Republican counsel to the Watergate committee.

SOMETHING FISHY

The unreconstructed West Sider Nora Ephron writes:

Joe Gurrera and I are not exactly friends, but we struck up a telephone relationship not long ago because of the recent difficulties at Citarella. Gurrera is the owner of Citarella, and I am a customer. That doesn't really describe me, though: I am besotted with his store, and it plays a fairly active role in what passes for my imagination.

Citarella is the Upper West Side's best-known fish market, but it now contains a magnificent meat department and an arresting display of prepared foods, fresh pasta, olive varieties, soups, and the like. One of my favorite things about the place is that you don't have to make up your mind about dinner until the last minute—you don't have to say to yourself, 'I think I want fish, therefore I'll go to the fish market,' or 'I think I want meat, therefore I'll go to the butcher.' At Citarella, you can take numbers from both counters, watch the fish twinkle and the

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL WITTE

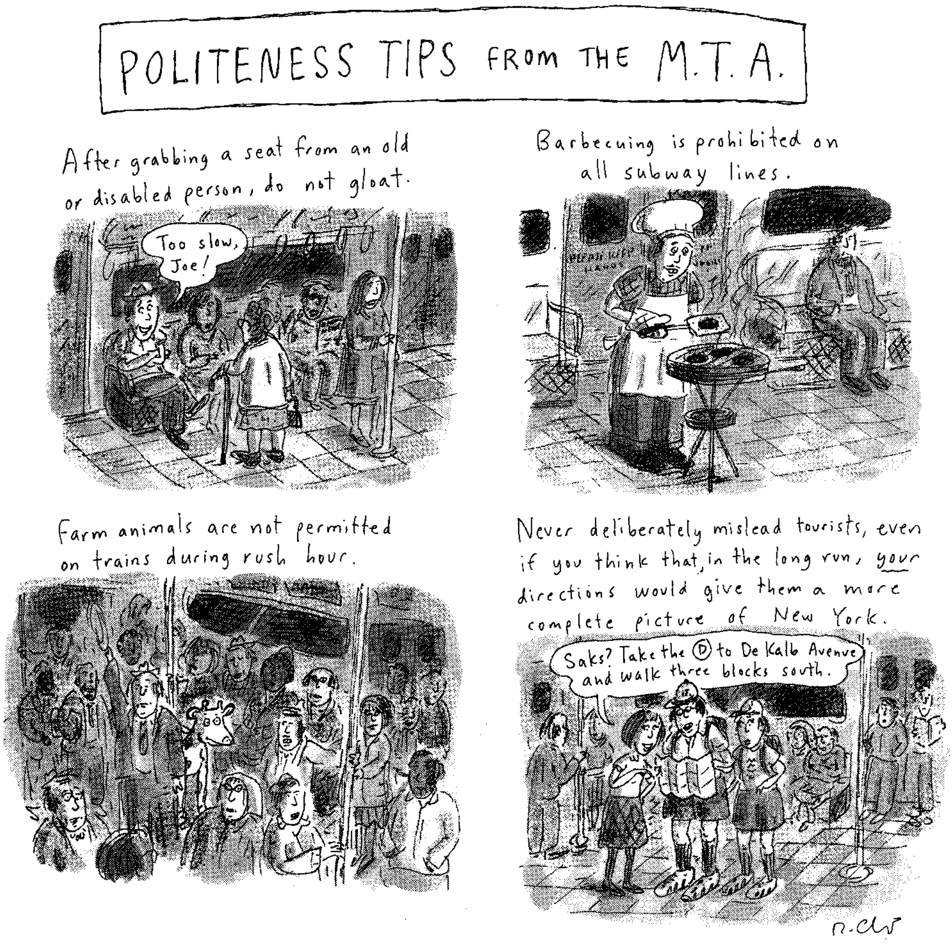
meat glisten, and not commit to either until your number is called.

The expansion of Citarella took place right around the time upper Broadway began to turn into a boulevard of romantic possibilities. The Reebok gym, the Barnes & Noble superstore, the Sony multiplex, Tower Records, Starbucks—it seems to me that anyone who can't find love at one of these places must not be trying. Citarella is right in the middle of this strip, at Seventy-fifth Street, and if I ever have to find love again, which thank God I do not, I like to think I could find it there; some man would ask the butcher what to do with veal shank, I would just happen to know, and shortly thereafter I'd have my next husband. That's a pretty pathetic romantic fantasy, I admit, but it's the sort of thing that people who think too much about food tend to come up with.

Anyway, back in August, three Citarella employees were fired and a picket line materialized in front of the store. I will spare you the details of the dispute, except to say that in my personal opinion Gurrera was a hundred per cent in the wrong, and if there's one place on earth you can't win a labor dispute if you are a hundred per cent in the wrong it's the Upper West Side. I tried to explain this to Gurrera in our telephone calls, but, not surprisingly, he did not share my take on the situation. I suggested that he settle immediately by giving the workers back their jobs, I urged him to fire his lawyer, I begged him not to force me to buy my holiday turkeys elsewhere—but he was having none of it. So I found a nice butcher at Ninetieth Street and Broadway. Yet every time I saw the picketers I felt sad. I felt as if someone had punched our neighborhood right in the eye. Months passed. It was almost spring. I went to Barcelona.

La Boquería is one of the jolliest markets I've ever been to, with amazing stands that sell big fat pistachio nuts, strawberries that taste like strawberries, and gorgeous plum tomatoes that Barcelonans cut in half and rub on bread to perfume it with tomato essence. But the fish stands are the most extraordinary: there are dozens of them, with clams no bigger than thumbnails and shrimp so huge they looked like baby lobsters. I was miles from home, but all I could think about was Citarella and the strike that wouldn't end. I thought about the delicious little New Zealand cockles I used to buy for clam sauce, and how I would never be able to buy them again; they would become the Upper West Side-liberal entry in my pantheon of lost tastes.

And then I came back to New York and discovered that the pickets were gone. The store had rehired the fired workers. I walked over to Citarella to buy dinner. I said hello to Joe Gurrera and congratulated him on his capitulation. I took numbers from both counters and looked around. The meat glistened and the fish was even more twinkly than usual, thanks to a new bank of overhead lights. The fishmongers had suddenly become personable and were saying things like "Enjoy!" as they handed over the fish. A man and a woman struck up a conversation over where to buy lobster base, and I listened for a while, hoping the conversation would result in love, but it didn't even result in a source for lobster base. I didn't care. My number was called. I bought meat and fish, and went home to cook spaghetti with clams and hot sausage for the love of my life.


POLITENESS TIPS FROM THE M.T.A.
After grabbing a seat from an old or disabled person, do not gloat.
Too slow, Joe!
Barbecuing is prohibited on all subway lines.
Farm animals are not permitted on trains during rush hour.
Never deliberately mislead tourists, even if you think that, in the long run, your directions would give them a more complete picture of New York.
Saks? Take the Ⓓ to De Kalb Avenue and walk three blocks south.

RENT ASUNDER

THE politics of New York's deeply entrenched rent-control laws have long been dictated by one simple fact: the political power of two and a half million New Yorkers who enjoy the laws' protection. Recently, however, their faith in the fifty-year-old system has been shaken by the determination of Joseph Bruno, the Republican leader of the State Senate, in Albany, to end rent control by blocking the laws' renewal in June. Bruno, a free-market conservative who represents the rural upstate district of Rensselaer County and wields immense power over his fellow-Republicans in the Senate, is demanding total loyalty from the Party. This challenge to the status quo has, predictably, brought an anguished response from the crowd downstate—notably from an organization called the New York State Tenants & Neighbors Coalition, whose chief noisemaker is Michael McKee. His strategy couldn't be clearer. "If we don't make the legislators more afraid of tenants than they are of Joe Bruno," he said, "we'll lose."

In an opening skirmish last week, Bruno blocked an effort by the Democraticcontrolled Assembly to extend the current rent laws for another four years. The next morning, McKee and two of his colleagues in the coalition were working the marble corridors of the Legislative Office Building, rallying their supporters and making sure that anyone who asked knew where they were coming from. McKee, a stocky figure with a sharply barbered white beard and the pink flush of constant vexation, said that Bruno was "on the moon." As for Governor Pataki, who shares Bruno's convictions but has so far taken a studiously neutral position on the issue, McKee let go with "He wants to pay off his landlord friends who bought his last election."

McKee concedes that he is a rent-control beneficiary; the rent for his three-room apartment in Chelsea is a steal at six hundred dollars a month. Still, he argues that the rules serve a larger social good. "My neighborhood would not have any low-income people if it weren't for rent control," he said. To this, most economists would reply that the cost of the social good is borne by the newcomers to New York for whom affordable apartments are in short supply, since rent control has discouraged investment in new housing. The point doesn't impress McKee. "We don't believe that landlords have a divine right to charge market rent," he said airily. In any case, he added, owners of rent-stabilized buildings in New York City have an average profit margin of thirty-nine per cent. (An official with the Rent Stabilization Association, a landlord group, points out that that figure does not account for such sizable costs as holding a mortgage.)

There are, of course, tens of thousands of New Yorkers who feel exactly as McKee does; many are middle-class people with a middle-class sense of entitlement. The coalition has tapped into their fear of Bruno by organizing tenants in the half-dozen or so districts represented by Republican senators which have significant numbers of rent-controlled units. Through community meetings, phone drives, and mass mailings, the coalition has tried to get across the message that a handful of senators have the power to drastically alter the lives of millions of tenants, and that groups of landlords have lobbied to end rent control over the last four years by donating some nine hundred thousand dollars to Republican coffers. Reaching into a backpack, McKee pulled out a letter sent to him by Guy Velella, the Republican senator from the Bronx, who wrote, "I am quickly reaching the end of my patience with your discourteous grandstanding and misleading of the tenants I represent."

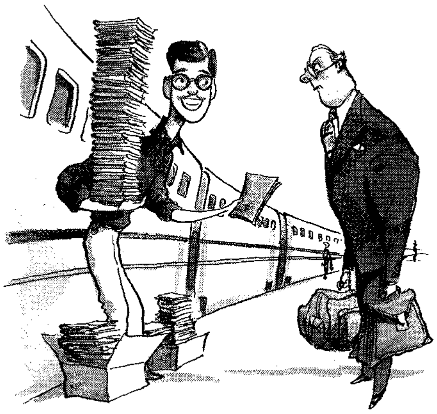
McKee dropped in on Assemblyman John Ravitz, a liberal Republican and ardent rent-controller who represents Manhattan's Upper East Side. Ravitz counselled him to lower his voice. "I've seen some of your flyers, and I don't think they help much," he said. "If you attack the senators personally, you're going to lose their vote." "We're not trying to be friends with them," McKee snapped. "We don't *need* to talk to them."

By the end of the day, McKee was feeling upbeat. The Democrats were preparing to hold the budget hostage unless Bruno relented. McKee was formulating plans to reach out to Pataki, and to his chief political patron, Senator Alfonse D'Amato, and he was pleased that Rudolph Giuliani had agreed to address a major rent-control rally next month. McKee knows exactly where the Mayor is coming from. "This issue will not be decided on the merits," he said coolly. "It will be decided on the politics."

FREE VERSE

EVEN though it was only a few days before the first of April—the beginning of National Poetry Month—the last thing passengers must have been expecting when they boarded the 4 P.M. Metroliner from New York to Washington was iambic pentameter, but that's just what they got from a tall twenty-seven-year-old man named Andrew Carroll, who was giving away copies of "Early Poems" by Yeats. "You can't help but feel like some sort of weirdo," Carroll said, as he made his way down the aisle, dispensing thin, softcover volumes from a cardboard box. "One woman wanted to know if I was promoting a cult." A heavyset man in a gray flannel suit asked if he could get his book signed by the author. When he glanced at the cover and saw who the author was, he shook his head slowly and said, "I used to be an English major before I was corrupted by the law."

Carroll was an English major himself, with no particular interest in poetry, when he read a speech given by Joseph Brodsky in which the late Nobel laureate took exception to the conventional wisdom that poetry is only for highbrows, and proposed a populist dissemination of verse. "Honestly, I thought Brodsky was a cosmonaut at first," Carroll recalled. "But that speech was like a lightning bolt. It had this incredible democratic, egalitarian spirit." Carroll wrote Brodsky, and the poet wrote back. In 1992, over coffee in the Village, they formed the American Poetry and Literacy Project, based in Carroll's home town of Washington.



Since then, the A.P.L.P., which is funded mainly through private donations and buys thrift editions in bulk from Dover Publications, has distributed more than a hundred thousand collections of poetry through such venues as Head Start programs, prisons, homeless shelters, and nursing homes. The project has given away poetry in airports, the Boston subway system, and the Criminal Courts Building in Manhattan. In 1995, Carroll arranged for poems by forty poets, including Tennyson and Frost, to be published in several Long Island phone books. On the cruellest day of this month—April 15th—Carroll will be one of two dozen volunteers who will show up at seven post offices around the country to hand out "The Waste Land."

Having emptied his carton of Yeats, Carroll took a seat in the club car. "Even if people accept my handouts because of idle curiosity, it might be enough to turn them into poetry readers, at least for the ride," he said. "The motto of poetry is 'Pay Attention!' " He glanced out the window and added, "I always remember a story Kenneth Koch told me. He was walking Marianne Moore home from a party when she said, 'Young man, I want to give you a present,' then pointed to a Chihuahua in a red sweater. That's what I'm trying to do." ♦

"Secret Service," Joe Conason; "Something Fishy," Nora Ephron; "Rent Asunder," James Traub; "Free Verse," Colin Moynihan.

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WASHINGTON DIARY

LOCKED IN THE CABINET

How the author discovered—with a little help from Bill, Hillary, and the Democrats—that it was kind of dark in there.

BY ROBERT B. REICH

KITCHEN DEBATE

Little Rock, November 18, 1992

BILL and Hillary and I are sitting in the kitchen of the Governor's Mansion, sipping tea and shooting the breeze. He tells a joke, makes himself a sandwich. They act as if nothing particularly unusual has happened. I half expect Bill to say, "Oh, and by the way, did you hear? Couple of weeks ago I was elected President of the United States. Want some peanut butter?"

Two images are superimposed: the Bill and Hillary I've known for some twenty years and a new Bill and Hillary—the President-elect of the United States and the soon-to-be First Lady. Here, in their kitchen, they're mostly the former. But every few minutes I see them differently, the way the nation sees them: as the First Couple, who embody the hopes and fears, and evoke the adulation and the anger, of two hundred and sixty million Americans.

Bill blows his nose. It's a loud honk, like a wild goose. The spell is broken. "Goddam allergies," he says. "I don't know *what* I'm gonna do in Washington. It's the pollen capital of the world."

"I think you're getting a cold," Hillary says, frowning. "You shouldn't have been out in that rain last night."

"It's an *allergy*. I don't get colds."

She looks toward me and shakes her head. "He gets these colds, and he calls them allergies, and that gets him off the hook for being irresponsible."

The phone rings. Hillary picks it up. Bill continues to blow.

Hillary hangs up. "I can't believe it, Bill. The movers are coming tomorrow to start crating things up. Weren't they supposed to come next week?"

"Yeah. That's what they said." He's still sniffling.

"We're not the slightest bit ready for them. I haven't even started on Chelsea's room."

This could be any family trying to move from one place to another. It just happens to be the First One, moving from here to the White House.

"Bobby." She turns to me. "How often have you and Clare uprooted yourselves since you were married? I've lost count." Hillary is suddenly aware that I haven't said a thing for five minutes and wants to include me in the conversation. Maybe she's also subtly sounding me out about joining the Administration. She works on many levels, as does he.

"Five or six times, I think. Moving sucks."

"It's *awful*," she agrees. "But we can't very well stay here now. George and Barbara are moving out to make room for us." She giggles.

"I hope they leave the chandeliers," Bill says, then laughs.

"At least clean out the skeletons from the closets," Hillary says. Then she laughs raucously, laughter shaking her whole body.

It's good to see them this relaxed.

"More tea?" Hillary pours.

"Thanks."

"So what have you decided to do? Would you be interested in coming to Washington?" she asks.

"I really don't know." I'd rather not think about it now.

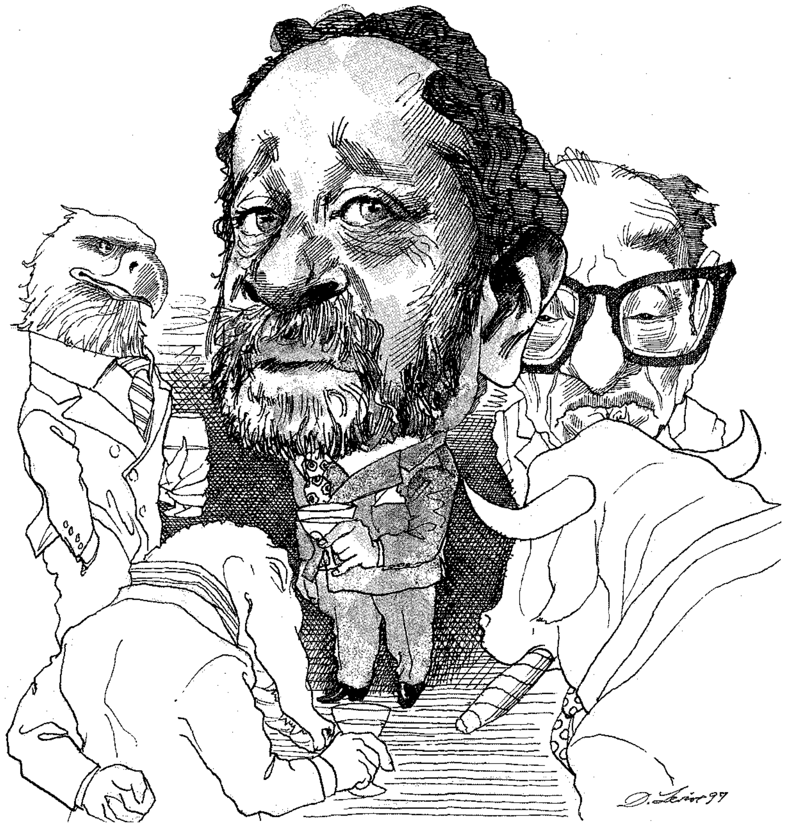
"Clare hates the town, doesn't she?" I doubt she and Clare have ever spoken about it, but Hillary somehow knows.

Bill sneezes and wipes his nose. "I don't blame her," he says. "Why would anyone want to live in Washington?"

Why indeed? Why do the two of them want to subject themselves to that hellhole? Not for power or celebrity. They both know as well as I there's not much of either left there anymore. Presidential power is limited, shared, diffused. Celebrity is fleeting. It can turn against you instantly.

We all went to law school together, and continued sharing our concerns and our ideals. We weren't going to use our law degrees to practice law. Law for us was a tool for advancing social justice, for insuring that everyone had a fair chance to make it. And then the two of them went back to Arkansas to begin their political odyssey. I remember wondering how they'd keep their ideals intact, and wondering also about Hillary and the additional compromises she'd have to make as wife and political partner. But I never fully understood how they did it—how they balanced means and ends. When to compromise? What to sacrifice? Whom to sacrifice? I suppose that's why I didn't choose politics for myself. It seemed too hard to keep ideals and ambitions in the proper perspective.

And now they're packing up and moving to Washington to lead the country, and they seem to be wanting me to join them, and it's frankly scaring the hell out of me.



The professor turned Secretary of Labor gets lessons in how Washington works.

DAVID LEVINE

QUESTION TIME

Washington, January 5, 1993

I'M cramming for my Senate confirmation hearing on Thursday, helped by several coaches, including the lawyers who did the background checks on me and several Democratic staffers from the Hill. I feel like a prizefighter getting ready for the big one.

This evening we do a dry run at the home of one of the lawyers. My coaches play the parts of senators on the committee. I sit facing them.

"Mr. Reich, you've had absolutely no experience managing a big organization, have you?"

"Mr. Reich, do you believe that employers should have the right to permanently replace striking workers?"

"Mr. Reich, what will you do to end silly nitpicking regulations, like the OSHA rule that prohibits painted ladders in the workplace?"

"Mr. Reich, are you a socialist?"

"Mr. Reich, should Congress require that states pay half the cost of extended unemployment insurance?"

"Mr. Reich, have you ever had to meet a payroll?"

"Mr. Reich, do you support NAFTA, and, if so, why?"

"Mr. Reich, do you believe that defined-benefit pension plans are seriously underfunded, and, if so, what would you do about the problem?"

I grope for words. I babble. On the rare occasion when I actually have something intelligent to say, I give long and complicated answers.

"Time *out*," says my chief interrogator, a rotund, middle-aged Hill staffer with graying red hair and decades of experience at this sort of thing. "Let's stop here and critique your performance so far."

"Look," he says, stepping out from behind the table that serves as a mock committee rostrum. "This hearing isn't designed to test your knowledge. Its purpose is to test your respect for *them*."

I'm confused and hurt. I feel as though I've failed an exam. He senses it.

"You don't have to come up with the right answer," he continues, pacing around the room. "You've got a big handicap. Your whole life you've been trying to show people how smart you are. That's not what you should do on Thursday. You try to show them how smart you are, you're in trouble."

"But I have to answer their questions, don't I?"

"Yes and no," he says. "You have to *respond* to their questions. But you don't have to *answer* them. You *shouldn't* answer them. You're not *expected* to answer them."

The others laugh. I'm bewildered. "What's the difference between answering and responding?" I ask.

"Respect! *Respect!*" my chief interrogator shouts. He walks over to me and leans down so that his face is close to mine. "This is all about respect," he says. "Your respect for them. The President's respect for them. The executive branch's respect for the legislative branch. Look, the President has nominated you to be a Cabinet secretary. They have to consent to the nomination. Barring an unforeseen scandal, they will. But first you have to *genuflect*." He gets on his knees, grabs my hand, and kisses it. The others roar. "You let them know you respect their power and you'll continue to do so for as long as you hold office." He sits down again. He lowers his voice. The others in the room are enjoying the spectacle. "If you *lecture* them, they don't feel you respect them. But if you respond to their questions with utter humility, they will feel you do."

"Utter humility?"

"Have you ever in your life admitted you don't know something?" He grins, relishing the moment.

"Sure."

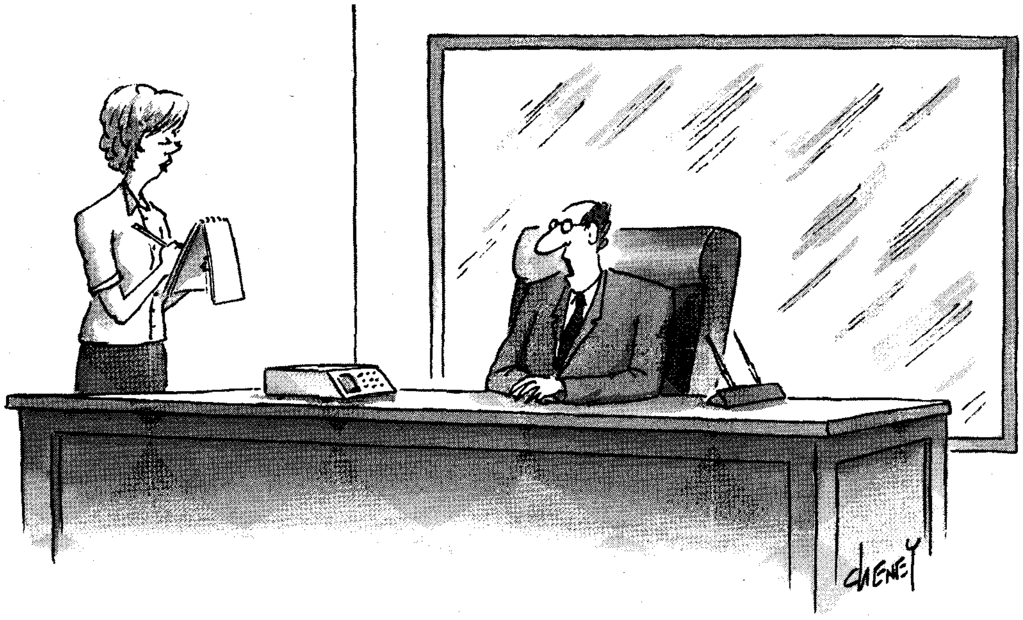
"But have you ever admitted you didn't know when you knew just enough to bullshit your way through?"

I'm cornered. I pause. "Not often."

He's up again, pacing. "On Thursday, whenever you're not absolutely sure of the answer, I want you to say simply, 'I don't know, Senator.' "

"O.K."

He stops and points his finger at



" 'You pushy, manipulative, tyrannical scum . . .' Scratch that. 'Dear Mom and Dad . . .' "

• •

me. "Practice saying it. *I don't know, Senator.*"

"I don't know, Senator."

"Good! Again!"

"I don't know, Senator."

"Again!"

"*I don't know, Senator.*" The others applaud.

"Fine." He looks toward the group. "I think he's catching on." Laughter.

Then back to me again. "And even when you're absolutely sure, and you have it all worked out in your head, I want you to give a simple answer. One sentence. Two at most. Simple and general. No specifics. Don't show off what you know."

This is going to be hard.

"And"—he brings his face closer and looks me dead in the eye—"as often as you can say it without it sounding contrived, I want you to tell them how much you look forward to working with them. *I look forward to working with you on that, Senator.*"

"I look forward to working with you on that, Senator."

"*I don't know, Senator. But I look forward to working with you on it.*"

"I don't know, Senator, but I look forward to working with you on it."

"G-o-o-o-o-d." He smiles and is up pacing again. "And whenever you can do so without sounding like your nose is completely up their assholes, I want you to compliment them. Praise their leadership on the issue. Tell them you will need their help and guidance. Mention their years of diligence and hard work."

I rehearse. "Senator, you know far more about that issue than I do, and I look forward to hearing your views in the months and years to come."

"Wonderful!" he beams, and points at me. "And, remember, if they ask anything personal—about your writings, your political views, even your friendship with the President, whatever—*don't* take it personally. They are not interested in an answer. They are interested in *how* you respond."

"How I respond?"

"Deferentially. Good-naturedly. If they are nasty, don't be nasty back. If they are sarcastic, refrain from sarcasm. Never get angry. Never lose your balance. Never take the bait."

I feel like a child learning how to ride a bike. It looks so easy. It's not.

My interrogator puts an arm over my shoulder and addresses the others. "He'll do just fine, won't he?"

THE REAL POWER

The White House, February 13th

DEFICIT, deficit, deficit, deficit, deficit. We have to cut it. By how much? That's all we talk about in the Roosevelt Room.

It doesn't help that Bill is exhausted. I don't think he's sleeping at night. He can barely stay awake at today's meeting. When I make my usual point—"Mr. President, at this rate we won't have money left for your investments"—his eyelids droop and his pupils move up under them, leaving nothing but a narrow sliver of white eyeball. My influence has reached a new low. I'm addressing a sleeping President.

Meanwhile, for all I know, Alan Greenspan has been in touch with Bill. Greenspan haunts every budget meeting, though his name never comes up directly. Instead, it's always our "credibility" with Wall Street. It is repeatedly said that we must reduce the deficit because Wall Street needs to be reassured, calmed, convinced of our wise intentions. Never before in the history of mankind have the feelings of a street had such decisive force. The ancients worried about the moods of the skies, mountains, seas, and forests. We're placating a pavement.

Is Greenspan correct? Here's his theory: Unless the federal government makes a radical commitment to balancing the budget, global lenders (including Americans themselves) will demand higher and higher interest payments on loans to businesses in the United States, because the demand for private savings will far outstrip the supply. Private investment will thus decline. As a result, productivity will slow and inflation will accelerate. This theory is easy to state with conviction, but it is impossible to prove. Look back several decades and you see no direct relationship between deficits and interest rates.

But here's a different theory, equally plausible: Unless this country has a world-class workforce, global lenders will demand higher and higher interest payments in order to compensate for the risks that come with slowing productivity, high rates of crime, embittered labor-management relations, and an increasingly discontented working class eager to erect new trade barriers.

Time will tell who's right. But in the short term Greenspan can prove his own theory correct because only he has the power to raise or lower short-term interest rates. Like Paul Volcker, the Fed chief before him, Greenspan can put the economy into a tailspin simply by tightening his grip. Volcker did it in 1979, and Jimmy Carter was fired. Bill Clinton knows that. Greenspan has the most important grip in town: Bill's balls, in the palm of his hand.

FED UP

Washington, March 9th

ALAN GREENSPAN has invited me to lunch at the Federal Reserve, probably because he thinks I whisper liberal thoughts into Bill's ear. He would like to win me over and learn what I'm whispering, so he can whisper the opposite into Bill's other ear.

I'm met by an older man who resembles an English butler in a murder mystery. He escorts me to Greenspan's private dining room, on the top floor.

"The Chairman will be a few minutes late. Can I get you a drink while you wait, sir?"

"No, thank you."

"Very well then, sir."

The room is tastefully decorated—an antique clock, a Louis XIV sideboard, fresh-cut flowers. The view of the Mall is spectacular. The table is set for two—linen tablecloth, heavy silverware, china plates and bowls, cloth napkins. The egalitarian zealotry of the rest of the executive branch has not reached this rarefied precinct.

"Hello, Mr. Secretary." Greenspan beams and extends his hand. "Sorry to be late." His voice is soft, and his words emerge slowly. He is a little man, slightly stooped, balding, large nose, wide lips, wry smile. He wears thick glasses.

We have never met before, but I instantly know him. One look, one phrase, and I know where he grew up, how he grew up, where he got his drive and his sense of humor. He is New York. He is Jewish. He looks like my Uncle Louis, his voice is my Uncle Sam. I feel we've been together at countless weddings, bar mitzvahs, and funerals. I know his genetic structure. I'm certain that within the last five hundred years—perhaps even more recently—we shared an ancestor.

Greenspan clearly enjoys a good discussion. When he is making a point he considers especially important, his eyebrows rise and his sentence ends with a mischievous grin. He flatters me by telling me that something I've said is interesting, that he had never thought of it. I suspect bullshit.

Meanwhile, the butler serves us lentil soup, followed by lamb chops and fried potatoes. Would you care for more, sir? Coffee, sir? May I interest you in dessert, sir?

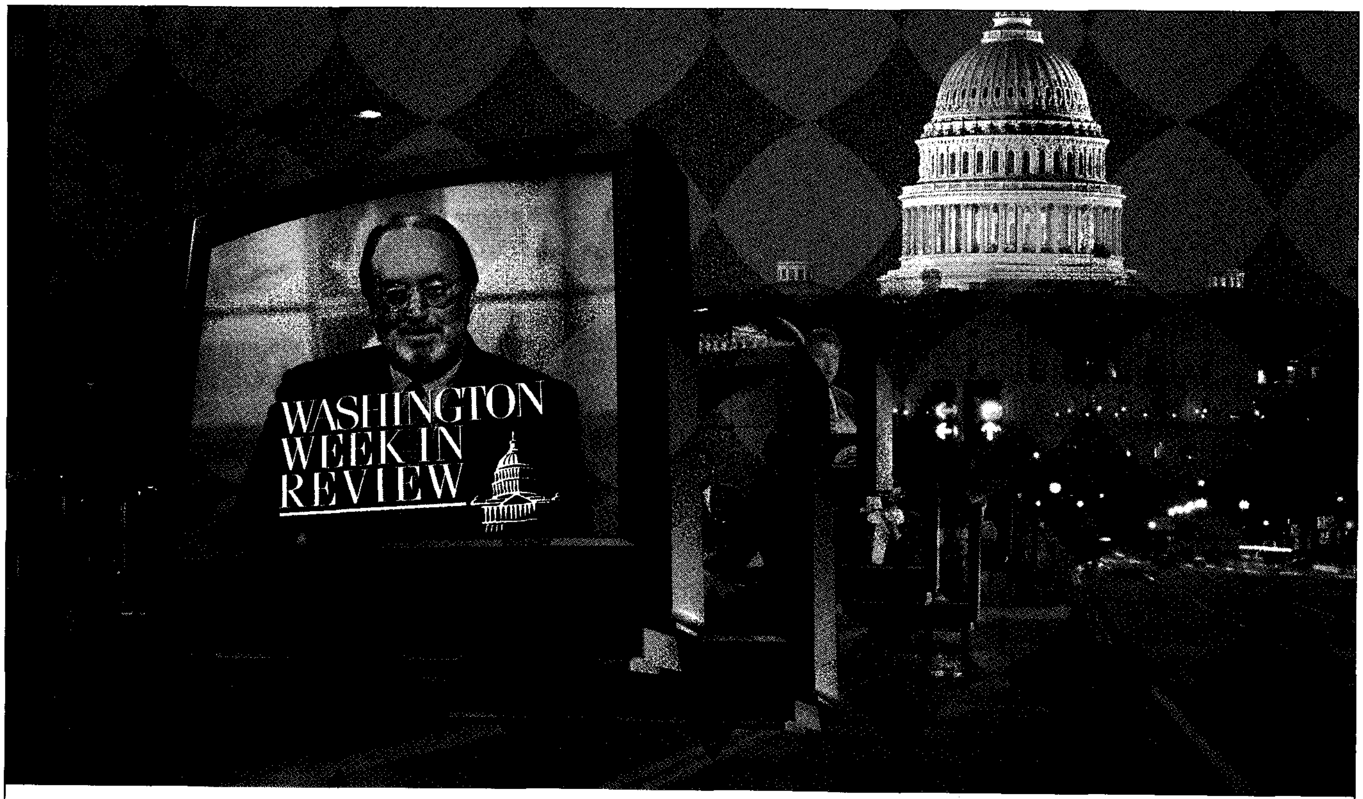
The hour is over. Greenspan walks me to the car, then extends a warm hand accompanied by the same wry smile he began with. "It's been a pleasure. I've learned something."

"For me as well. Thank you for the invitation."

"Let's do it again," says Uncle Alan.

And then off I go, back to the Labor Department, feeling pampered and charmed. I actually like the guy. He's thoughtful and likes to talk about things more weighty than Washington gossip. Greenspan got out of the lunch exactly what he wanted. Yet I never asked him the questions I intended to ask and never got the answers I imagined he'd give.

Q: *Mr. Chairman, how did a shy little*



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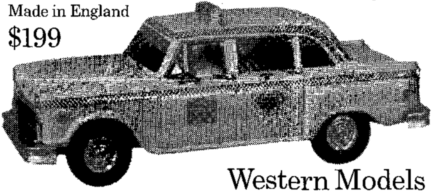

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Jewish guy like you get to be the most powerful man in America?

A: *I'm cunning and ambitious and very, very smart.*

Q: *You're a Republican and a follower of Ayn Rand?*

A: *And proud of it. Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and Bush all appointed me to powerful positions.*

Q: *What's your purpose in life?*

A: *To stamp out inflation.*

Q: *Even if that means high unemployment?*

A: *You bet.*

Q: *Even if it requires slow growth and stagnant wages?*

A: *Right you are.*

Q: *Even if it means drastic cuts in federal programs that help average working people and the poor?*

A: *Absolutely, if that's what it takes to balance the budget and remove all temptation to inflate away the government's debt.*

Q: *But why? A little inflation never hurt anybody.*

A: *You're wrong. It hurts bond traders and lenders.*

Q: *But why place their interests over everybody else's interests in good jobs?*

A: *Because I'm a capitalist and capitalism is driven by the filthy rich. They make their money off bonds. Your constituents are just plain filthy. They have to work for a living.*

Q: *You're the nation's central banker. You should be accountable to all Americans.*

A: *But I'm not, and neither is the Fed.*

Q: *That's not fair, it's not right.*

A: *Nyah-na-na-nyah-na. You can't stop me.*

Q: *Can too.*

A: *Can not.*

Q: *Can too. The President's my friend.*

A: *So what?*

Q: *So he won't reappoint you when your second term expires.*

A: *Oh no?*

Q: *No.*

A: *Well, we'll see about that.*

Q: *You think he'll reappoint you?*

A: *No doubt about it.*

Q: *Why are you so sure?*

A: *Because he needs me.*

Q: *Oh yeah?*

A: *Yeah.*

Q: *What does he need you for?*

A: *He needs me because he needs the confidence of Wall Street, and only I can deliver that to him.*

Q: *Oh yeah?*

A: *Yeah. That's why Bush reappointed me in 1992, even though he hated me for keeping interest rates high as the economy slipped into recession in 1990. I could do it to your man, too. I could do worse. He'll reappoint me. He'll do whatever I want him to.*

Q: *Well, you can take your crummy lunch and cram it, you robber-baron pimp.*

A: *Go suck on a pickle, you Bolshevik dwarf.*

A GOOD FIGHT

Galesburg, Illinois, January 10, 1995

I'M riding with Bill in his bulletproof, bombproof limo on the way back from a speech he gave at a community college here. I'm wedged into the tiny jump seat just across from where Bill sits. No one else in the executive branch of government is able to fit here, which gives me an enormous advantage. Whenever I'm in this spot, White House staff get nervous, and with good reason. In an Administration where proximity counts, I couldn't be better positioned. My objective is simple: Get Bill's assent to a minimum-wage increase.

"Good speech," I say.

Bill is reading through a bunch of memos. He doesn't respond.

"The part about millions of Americans working harder for less—half of them earning less money now than they did fifteen years ago . . . It's good you're speaking out on this."

"It's a big problem," he says, without looking up.

"And I also liked what you said about the importance of education and job training. Too bad we don't have enough money in the budget to do much about it."

He doesn't respond. He's putting check marks next to certain items in the memo. It's the first time I've noticed that his check marks are in reverse. Most lefties do normal checks.

"Of course," I continue, "people at the bottom still need extra help. The expansion of the earned-income tax credit gave them a boost, but not enough to get them out of poverty."

Still no response, but I know my words are somehow getting through.

"I just heard an interesting fact," I say. It's a sure way to get Bill to stop what he's doing and pay attention. He loves interesting facts.

He looks up. "Whasit?"

"One of my staff calculated that a member of Congress makes more money in just three weeks than a minimum-wage worker earns in a year."

"Hmm." He's back into his memo. Evidently not interesting enough.

I try again. "Don't you think that we'll be defined by the fights we have with the Republicans?"

"Yup." He doesn't look up.

"The minimum wage will be a hell of a good fight."

He puts down his memo and looks up. "You can stop lobbying, Bob. I'll propose it in the State of the Union." He's instantly back into the memo.

Mission accomplished. Two minutes later, Bill puts down his pen and looks up again. "You're right."

"About the minimum wage?"

"About the fights." He stares out the window. "We'll be defined by the fights we have. We've got to pick them carefully."

THREE-RING CAUCUS

Washington, February 2nd

I'M off to the Hill.

Any meeting with more than two members of Congress is a free-for-all. They're all entrepreneurs these days—angling for credit with their constituents, favors for big donors, attention from the national media. Members of the House are especially difficult to harmonize, because the districts they represent are literally all over the map. And Democratic House members are more unruly than Republican House members (unruliness is part of the Democratic ideology). So my expectations for this meeting are low.

It was supposed to begin at noon, and forty-five minutes later they're still filing in, yakking and yelling at one another, grabbing cheese and baloney sandwiches from a table at the entrance, tossing each other Cokes. It's a regular high school.

"May I have your attention?" Dick Gephardt is now the House minority leader, with the near-impossible job of maintaining a semblance of order. He's a mild-mannered sort whose politics are on the liberal edge of respectability, which means he supports a minimum-wage hike but won't stick his neck way out to get it.

"May I have your attention, *please*?"

They quiet down just enough for Gephardt to be heard over the din.

"We're here to talk about the minimum wage, and here's the Secretary of Labor."

A no-frills introduction if I ever heard one, followed by a few claps. Most of the members continue chatting among themselves.

I spend the next few minutes shouting out factoids. I refer to several large charts I've brought along for the occasion, but I needn't have bothered. The assembled legislators aren't watching. I then ask if there are any questions.

"Mr. Secretary!" yells Barney Frank, of Massachusetts. Barney's political views lie to the left of the rest of the Massachusetts delegation, which puts him in the Twilight Zone.

"Yes?"

"You said that if Congress wants to go higher than seventy-five cents an hour the President will consider it. How high will he go?"

A trick question. "It depends on you guys' coming to a consensus about what you want."

"I think I hear what you mean, Mr. Secretary." Barney normally speaks in a nasal yell. Today his volume is even higher than usual. "*You're saying that if we could get a con-sen-sus on a hike of a dollar an hour, the President would sign on?*"

The room is suddenly quieter.

"It's really up to all of *you*. We look forward to working with you on it."

"So your answer is *yes!* We agree among ourselves to raise the minimum by a *dollar* an hour, and the President *would support it!*"

"Yes, but only if—"

"That's *wonderful* news! You made my day, Mr. Secretary."

The room erupts in cheers mixed with howls of protest. A gaunt-looking congressman sitting in the front row lifts up a thick report he's been thumbing through and smashes it to the floor. "God *damn* it," he explodes, and walks out of the meeting.

Gephardt tries to restore calm. "Please. Please. Let's hear everyone out." He nods to an exasperated member who's jumping up and down.

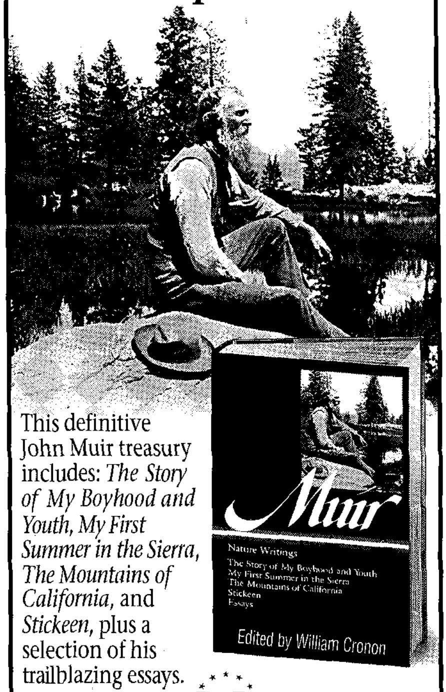
"Take a good look around this room," the animated congressman begins. "Why do you think there are so few of us left? Why do you think the public rejected so many of us last November? Because this Party couldn't let go of old Democratic ideas that are *obsolete*, like *raising the minimum wage*."

Applause mixed with catcalls and boos.

Fifty hands are in the air, all demanding airtime. Gephardt's attempt at order is breaking down. Members begin interrupting one another.

"I can't *believe* we're arguing over whether to *raise* the *minimum wage*, for Chrissake! We're *Democrats*. In 1989, we—"

"Forget 1989. In 1994 we had our



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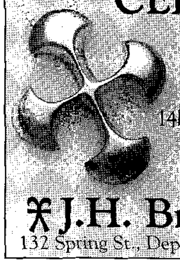

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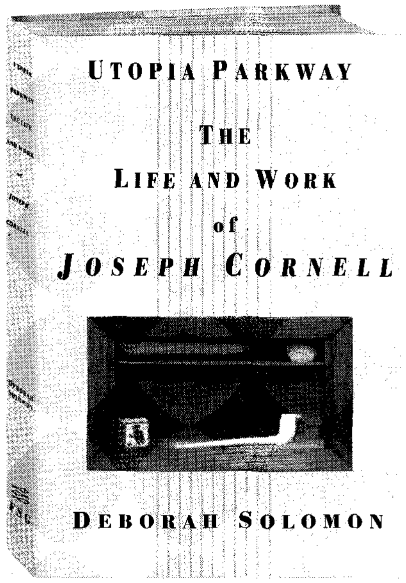

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God-damned *heads* handed to us. If we do this—"

"Whatever we do, let's do it *together*. If we go out there and start pissing on each other again, we'll—"

Gephardt finally gets them to quiet down. "Now, *listen*, all of you," he says wearily. "You heard the Secretary of Labor." Gephardt points to me. "The President is willing to take the *lead* on this minimum-wage bill, and I think we owe the President our full support."

Boos, applause.

Gephardt winks at me. I don't know exactly how it happened, but I think the President just took the lead. Gephardt continues. "Now, the President is going to propose a specific increase in the minimum wage, and he plans to do it *very* soon. And, whatever it is, we have to be united behind him. I propose that we form a committee to decide what we want to recommend. . . ." Half the group are already on their way out of the room. The other half are arguing with each other. No one can hear what Gephardt is saying. He gives up.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

The White House, April 8th

I UNLOCK the door of the tiny one-toilet rest room at the far end of the West Wing corridor and swing it open. Al Gore is waiting patiently in the corridor. "Hi, Al," I say on my way out.

"Hi, Bob," he says on his way in.

I wait until he emerges, to try to find out what the hell's happening around here. Bill was all set to veto the Republicans' latest proposal to cut even more out of this year's budget. Then, at the last minute, he agreed to almost all of the cuts. And yesterday he was supposed to give a major speech on education, training, and lifelong learning. But it turned into something entirely different. He spoke of the importance of compromise and specified issues on which he already agreed with the Republicans and those on which he hoped to reach agreement.

The door opens and I pounce. "What's going on with the President?"

Gore pauses. "Maybe we should talk in my office," he says quietly. I'm suddenly aware of how discreet he is.

His office is perfectly square, simply furnished, with a large photograph of the earth covering most of one wall. I sit on a small green couch, Gore on a chair next to it.

"What happened?" I ask. "The new education and job-training cuts bring the total *under* where Bush was in 1992. And we're not even putting up a fight."

"It was last-minute," he says. "A shitty decision-making process."

"Shitty process *and* a shitty decision. What gives?"

"He's afraid of what they'll do if he doesn't coöperate on the budget," Gore says dryly.

"What *could* they do?"

"Close down the government," Gore offers without a trace of emotion.

"*Would* they?"

"Maybe." He smiles mockingly. "When two sides can't agree, strange things happen. Nobody believed baseball would shut down."

"We can't let them blackmail us, Al. We have to draw the line somewhere, don't we?" I feel myself heating up even in the presence of Mr. Cool.

"I don't know." Gore becomes intensely serious. "Where do we draw the line? *Do* we draw the line? You've known the President far longer than most of us. He doesn't like drawing sharp lines."

"And that's where Dick Morris comes in?"

"You might say that."

"Morris wants him to compromise, keep moving toward the Republicans?"

"You got it." Gore isn't comfortable talking about Morris. He's about to stand and usher me to the door.

"What do *you* think we should do?" I ask.

"*Me*?" He points toward himself mockingly, as if no one had ever asked his opinion before. "We're gonna have to fight eventually. When we do, we have to be in the strongest position possible."

"So what ground do we defend?"

"The high ground." Gore hints at a smile. "But, of course, not everyone agrees."

I leave Al's office bewildered.

STAYING THE COURSES

Washington, July 16th

WHEN Bill, Hillary, Clare and I, and a few friends enter Kinkead's—an elegant restaurant on Pennsylvania Avenue a few blocks from the White House—the other diners don't seem to notice. Perhaps they're jaded. Kings, queens, Hollywood celebrities, media moguls, and cyber-tycoons regularly swish through here, so what's the big deal? The maître d' ushers us through the crowd and into a small private dining room at the top of the stairs.

"I'm *hungry*," Hillary declares, with a belly laugh. When she relaxes, she's down-home, even in swanky Kinkead's.

It's the first time the four of us have had time together since the election. We talk about our kids. We share gossip and funny anecdotes and recommendations for books and movies. Bill and Hillary are no longer the President and the First Lady—they're one of the dwindling number of couples we've seen on and off since college.

"I'm gonna miss you, Clare," Bill says. He and Hillary have planned this occasion as a going-away dinner for Clare, who must return to our home in Massachusetts to resume her job. She is touched.

"Bob, you should move into the White House with us!" Hillary offers cheerfully. "Plenty of bedrooms on the second floor." She looks at Bill. "After all, Eleanor Roosevelt filled up the place with her friends."

Bill is less than enthusiastic. "You wouldn't be comfortable in a museum," he says. He quickly changes the subject to the latest Republican outrage, which provokes fits of indignation. Then we entertain each other with theories about the antics of several Republican freshmen.

The dessert tray arrives. Bill and I go for the pies.

We're feeling mellow. The conversation turns to larger themes. Bill is philosophical. "The problem for us is that *they* offer an explanation for why wages are stuck and why people feel insecure," he says. "They pin the blame on taxes, deficit spending, immigrants, and welfare mothers. All that's just displacing the real problem. But when *we* tell people they need better skills and more education, we seem to be blaming working people themselves."

"*Exactly*," I say, delighted with his analysis. "Their explanation is dead wrong, but more appealing. That's why we *shouldn't* talk only about personal responsibility. We should talk about society as a whole, including the private sector. After all, we're balancing the budget and sacrificing public investment so that corporations have more money to invest. At the least, we should expect them to invest with their employees and communities in mind."

There's an awkward pause. Have I overstepped the line? The private dining room in one of Washington's classiest restaurants suddenly feels like an inappropriate place to entreat the President of the United States to speak out against corporate irresponsibility.

"It seems to me," says Clare, weighing her words carefully, "that corporations are downsizing not only themselves but also a big part of the middle class." She's bailed me out. I want to kiss her.

I throw caution to the winds and ask Bill, "Would you be comfortable saying what Clare just said?"

"I have to keep myself from saying it every day," he says softly.

There's proof! Bill really *does* care about these things. I should stop worrying about Dick Morris and Bill's retreats on the budget. At bottom, he's still with me, and I with him.

"These are *real* issues, Bill." Hillary is fired up. "Executive pay, for example. The average C.E.O. of a big firm is now earning—what is it?—two hundred times the average hourly wage. Twenty years ago, the ratio was about *forty* times. They're abandoning loyal workers. They're leaving their communities. People all over this country are really upset about this."

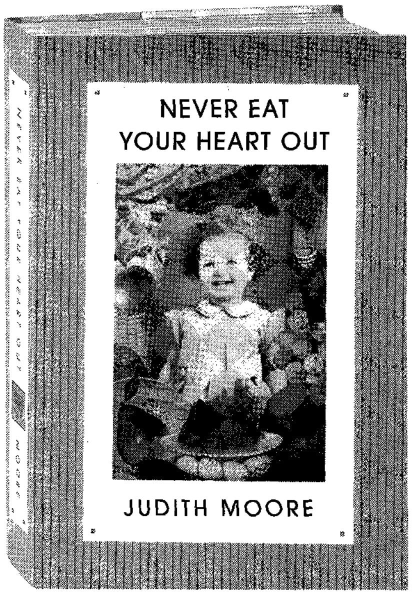
"I know, I know," says Bill. "But I shouldn't be out in front on these things. I can't be criticizing."

"Well, *somebody* in the Administration ought to be making these arguments," Hillary says, glancing at me.

"I agree," says her husband, nodding in my direction.

I think I just got put on the firing line again. We get up to leave. Bill takes the check. Hillary and Bill hug Clare and wish her well. All of us walk back down the steps into the main restaurant.

Everyone in the entire dining room stands and applauds. Perhaps I was wrong about how jaded Washington has become. (Maybe they simply hadn't seen us walk in.) Bill spends ten minutes shaking hands. And then we're out on the sidewalk, where two hundred others who evidently heard that the President was here have gathered, and they also applaud and cheer. There are klieg lights and cameras. Bill waves. Hillary waves. Somewhere in the distance a clock chimes midnight. A reverse Cinderella: These two human beings are once again transformed into royalty. And Clare and I are once again members of the royal court. ♦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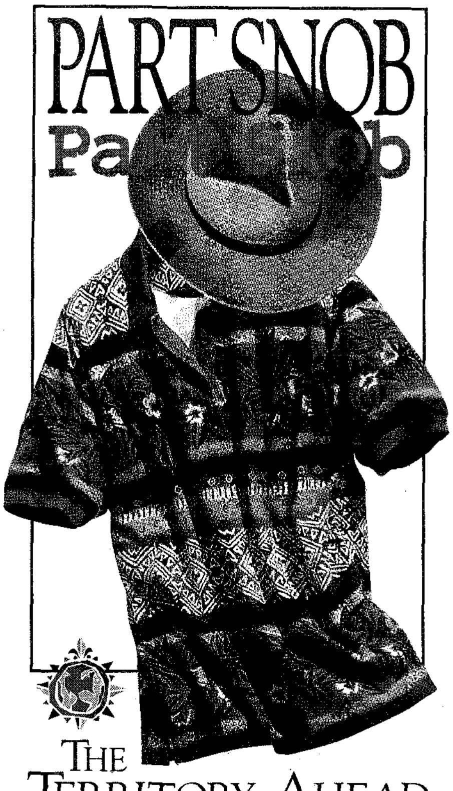

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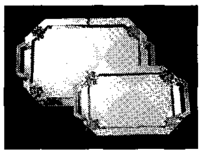

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LETTER FROM BEIJING

BAD BOY

Why China's most popular novelist won't go home.

BY JAMIE JAMES

UNTIL a year ago, there was something very like an artistic renaissance in the People's Republic of China. In response to all the foreign schemes and ideas brought in by the market reforms of Deng Xiaoping, the government was encouraging writers and filmmakers to create homegrown novels and films to compete with Western imports. Creative artists were allowed considerable freedom to portray the changing realities of Chinese life, as long as they didn't get too political. Then, last October, the authorities—seized by one of their periodic fits of intellectual housecleaning—announced a new campaign of "spiritual civilization" which prohibited anything that promoted "social vices" or would make people "doubt the future of socialism." One of the chief targets of this crusade was the hugely successful novelist and filmmaker Wang Shuo, whose darkly funny, sometimes violent narratives depict the social upheavals in modern China with unforgiving frankness. As part of the crackdown, the government banned distribution of Wang's twenty-five novels and withdrew the license for his new film, a sexy romance entitled "An Affair Between a Man and a Woman," which he had already begun shooting.

Wang, who is thirty-eight and grew up during the Cultural Revolution, recently arrived in New York for the publication by William Morrow of "Playing for Thrills," the first of his novels to be translated into English. American readers of Howard Goldblatt's graceful translation are likely to find the novel entertainingly familiar yet weirdly baffling. It begins by expertly mimicking the gumshoe genre of Hammett and Chandler: the cynical, wisecracking narrator, clearly the author's alter ego, comes home from a binge of gambling and drinking to find the police waiting for him in his apartment. It seems that the headless body of an Army buddy, murdered ten years earlier, has been found. The narrator may or may not be a suspect; he has no recollection of his own whereabouts at the time the murder is said to have taken place. Details of the plot pile up as he tries to untangle the events of his past, but the faster you turn the pages the farther you seem to be from grasping the truth. When one of the characters confronts the narrator about an impending crooked business deal, she speaks for the reader: "Should I take you seriously? How much of what you say is the truth? . . . Why are you like that? Because the truth cracks your teeth, or do lies just roll off your tongue?" The narrator replies, "They just roll off my tongue. The truth can't crack my teeth, because there isn't any truth to speak. What's there to say? And what's so great about the truth, anyway?"

Although it's couched in a cool, postmodernist idiom, Wang Shuo's ambivalence toward anything resembling objective truth is a venerable Chinese trait. In "The Search for Modern China" Jonathan Spence observes that "the swings of [China's] political life, the switches in its cultural moods, the lurches in its economy, the fact that its stated hostility to foreign influences is so often accompanied by the flashes of a welcoming smile, all combine to keep us in a state of bewilderment as to China's real nature." So it is with Wang himself, who in the past few weeks has managed to create a good deal of bewilderment among his American publishers and friends. PEN's Freedom-to-Write Committee was informed that he would not be attending a cocktail reception in his honor. Wang also cancelled a five-city publicity tour that was to have begun in Chicago with an appearance at the annual convention of the prestigious Association for Asian Studies. He left a terse voice-mail message with Howard Goldblatt, explaining that he had been called away by "an urgent personal matter," and then—like a Wang character—disappeared. His friends immediately suspected the worst; after all, the Chinese authorities aren't known to look kindly on those who displease them. Two weeks later, Wang surfaced in Los Angeles—as enigmatic as ever. He merely restated that he had to attend to a "personal matter"—"something very unpleasant"—and left it at that.

WANG is married and has an eight-year-old daughter, but, like many Chinese men, he keeps his family life separate from his professional and social pursuits. When I looked him up in Beijing earlier this year, he was staying at the Hua Du, a cheap business hotel in the center of the city, a dingy, overheated dump with peeling wallpaper. We had barely exchanged civilities when he announced that he was undaunted by the ban on his books. "I have always been opposed by the older intellectuals," he said. "That's the way the Communist Party does things. In order to advocate, they must oppose." He added airily that he was unconcerned for his readers, who, by some estimates, number in the millions; after all, they could still get their hands on pirated editions. Yes, I said, but what about the royalties? He shrugged, and said, without further explanation, "I have other ways of making money."

The Cultural Revolution, Wang Shuo says, was "a paradise for kids. We were out of control." Photograph by Bastienne Schmidt.

Apparently, those ways have been highly successful; whenever Wang Shuo and I got together, his Versace jeans bulged with hundred-yuan notes, and he peeled them away during his nocturnal rambles. Government criticism routinely uses such words as "hooligan" and "riffraff" to describe him. "In China, if you don't have a wife and a family and a job, then you're a hooligan," he said. "If you're not a hypocrite, then you're a hooligan." Chuckling, he added, "According to Chinese standards, all Americans are hooligans."

Wang's head is large, pale, and as round as a honeydew melon. When he laughs, he reveals tiny teeth, then covers his mouth with one of his delicate hands. Wang's interpreter told me that these dainty gestures have led some Chinese people to suspect, wrongly, that he's gay. When I asked him about this, he smiled and said, "Being handsome doesn't convict me, does it?"

He defiantly rejects being labelled a literary artist. "In China, intellectuals and so-called literary artists think they're a priesthood," he said. "We call them 'soul engineers'—creatures that are half man, half god. It's their responsibility to tell people what's moral and what's immoral."

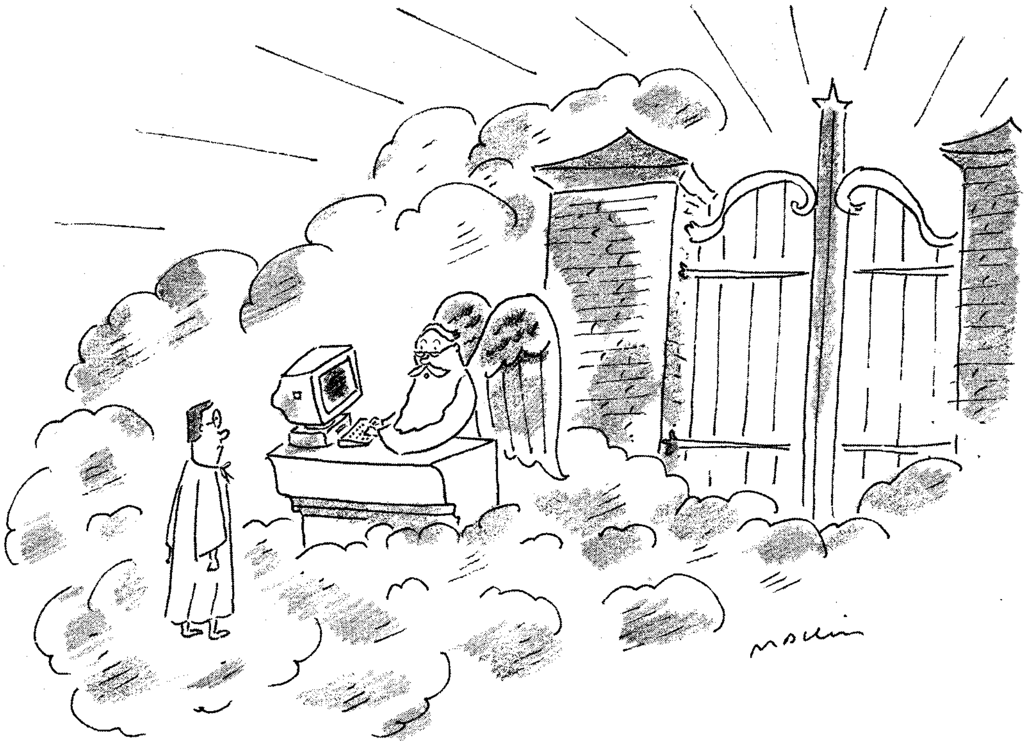
Five years ago, Wang realized that he was turning into a literary high priest himself, so he abandoned fiction for filmmaking. "I don't want to be a good person," he emphasized. "It's terrible to be a good person in China. Good people here lead the most miserable lives. If you're a good kid, you have to follow the rules, and be good all the time. If you're a bad kid, no one cares about you. I want to be a bad boy."

Although Wang's public image is that of a swaggering tough guy, his private manner is soft-spoken and unfailingly polite. In the eyes of Chinese officials, he is something far more dangerous than a dissident: he's a satirist with deadly aim. In a coming-of-age story that was made into a popular film called "In the Heat of the Sun," the adolescent protagonist puts the moves on a girl by telling her, "I feel about you the way the masses feel about the Party."

WANG was born in Nanjing in 1958, and grew up at a military compound in suburban Beijing, where his father was a teacher at the People's Liberation Army Institute and his mother was a physician. The Cultural Revolution of his childhood has served as the background for some of his most successful novels and films. Although in the West that era is regarded as one of the most appalling periods in Chinese history, for Wang Shuo and his friends it was a chance to run wild. "It was a paradise for kids," he told me. "We were out of control. Everything was turned upside down. The teachers who used to do the educating were sent away to be reëducated. Children were allowed to correct their parents."

He traces his desire to be a writer to the ideological exercises that were doled out as punishment. "Bad kids were forced to read self-criticisms before the class, while the good kids stood up and told about all the good deeds they had done," he said. "My first experience as a writer, when I was twelve, was a five-thousand-character"—roughly three-thousand-word—"essay of self-criticism. It was a good piece of literature." He had many such experiences, which he turned into opportunities to grandstand and to impress girls.

After leaving school, Wang joined the Navy and found himself stationed on a ship that seldom went to sea. There was little to do, so he took up writing as a pastime. He published his first fiction in military magazines—"short stories about friendships between the sailors, their feelings for the seabirds, that kind of crap," he told me. After completing his stint in the Navy, he went to work for a pharmaceutical wholesaler in Beijing. His job made him very popular with his pals. "Condoms were provided free, because of the government's birth-control program, but there was a quota," he said. "You had



"You're not coming up on my computer. How long did you say you've been dead?"

to fill out a form, stating your size and how many times you planned to have sex, and produce a marriage certificate. It was very embarrassing. My friends came to me instead, and I gave them as many condoms as they wanted."

It was around this time, the early eighties, that Wang reportedly became a petty smuggler and a bagman for various criminal types; when he is asked about this episode in his life, he insists, rather cryptically, that he never broke the law. In 1986, he began to publish novels and short stories that chronicled the misadventures of his friends—Navy buddies and unemployed layabouts—who drift from one dubious enterprise to another in order to keep themselves supplied with booze, cigarettes, and girls.

Success came in 1988, when his novels inspired four popular feature films. Today, Wang enjoys celebrity of a kind rarely known by writers anywhere in the world; when he walks the streets of Beijing, he is frequently stopped by readers who want to shake his hand. In 1992, he published a four-volume set of his collected works; they comprised the equivalent of nearly two million words, longer than "Remembrance of Things Past" by a good bit.

The stories in the collection show extraordinary range; there is really no such thing as a typical Wang Shuo novel. Whereas "Playing for Thrills," which was his first full-length book, conforms to his public image as a streetwise hipster, other works are tinged with an elegiac tone. Still others are pure farce. "An Attitude," a novella written in 1989, mercilessly parodies the Chinese literary establishment: some young loafers decide over a game of mah-jongg that they will become writers, mainly because it's the easiest way to mooch lunch; they end up being arrested for practicing literature without a license.

Wang contemplated writing an ambitious, Balzacian series of novels that might have become the definitive chronicle of his generation but eventually abandoned the project. Geremie Barmé, an Australian scholar of contemporary Chinese culture who has followed Wang's career closely, told me, "It would have been his life's work. But when he realized that it would take him four or five years to produce it, that's when he began to shy away from fiction and turned to film." Barmé is dismayed by the shift. "It's very sad that Wang Shuo's drive for money and fame—his therapy issues, as it were—has hindered his development as an artist," he said. "He is an extremely fine craftsman of the novel, and one of the best writers of the Chinese language."

Wang has written the screenplays for twelve films, and a year ago he directed his first feature, an adaptation of one of his novellas, "I Am Your Father," a quirky, funny story about an obtuse father and his rebellious son. Wang now says that he abandoned fiction because of the tedium of the process. "When you're writing, you're always alone," he said. "In film, you can hang out with your friends. Filmmaking is a young man's pursuit, and I'm afraid of growing old."

ONE snowy evening in Beijing, I had dinner with Wang at Sunflower Village, a theme restaurant that caters to prosperous members of Wang's generation who are nostalgic for the Cultural Revolution; several small dining rooms were primitively furnished with benches and low tables to suggest the huts of a farming commune, and the walls were covered with painted murals that evoked a mythical rustic past. A boozy party in an adjoining room set the tone with a sarcastic rendition of a sugary hymn to Mao. Wang's companion for the evening was a pretty woman, no longer young, who wore an ermine coat and clutched a lipstick-red handbag the size of an attaché case. He introduced her as a "short-story writer and fashion designer." As we sipped *erguotou*, a potent variety of white lightning favored by chic Beijingers, she told a succession of dirty jokes.

At Sunflower Village, the food is also intended to bring back the good old days of the Cultural Revolution. The waitress brought in the first dish—a plate of noodles topped with fried silkworms, crickets, cicadas, and scorpions, garnished with cherries dyed a poisonous shade of green. Wang popped one of the insects into his mouth. "I'm not sure that the food was exactly like this at the communes during the revolution," he said. Then he turned the conversation to the narrow-mindedness and hypocrisy of the authorities. "If they want to criticize you, they just say that you're 'influenced by the West'—that's enough," he said. "It's very stupid that people like me are being pushed to the Western side. I am forced to think that everything that is natural, normal, and real is Western." He was obviously looking forward to his imminent visit to America. Raising his glass, he proclaimed, "China is overdeveloped ideologically, and America is underdeveloped ideologically. Maybe America and I will make a good match."

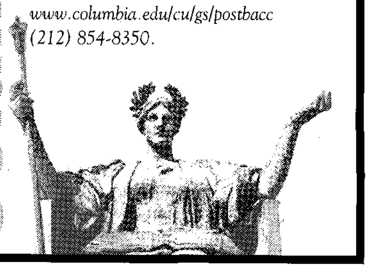
After dinner, we stopped by one of Wang's favorite hangouts, a discothèque called the Shadow. To the soundtrack from "Evita," young people in mismatched, logo-shrieking clothes milled about aimlessly. The writer-designer in the ermine coat joined the throng, and Wang and I took a table by the dance floor. He told me then that he had no political beliefs whatsoever. "There's a very famous dissident named Liu Xiaobo, who tried to persuade me to protest and make petitions and collect signatures," he said. "I refused. Now Liu is in a labor camp, and I am here." He gestured into the smoky gloom. "I was proved right. A writer is a writer. He should stay away from politics."

Perhaps, but politics won't stay away from Wang. He explained that when the ban on his works, literary and cinematic, was handed down he had already begun shooting "An Affair Between a Man and a Woman," a romantic triangle about a married screenwriter who has a sexual liaison with an actress. Although the script was mild compared with many Western movies in the Beijing cinemas—Wang calls his story an urban Chinese version of "The Bridges of Madison County"—the Beijing Film Bureau maintained that the movie would "corrupt the atmosphere of society." Wang tried to save the film by removing some of the sexual content and adding a scene in which the adulterous couple was turned away by a righteous hotel clerk, but the bureaucrats were unmoved. "The authorities say that my film will encourage people to follow immoral activities, that such films are responsible for the rising divorce rate," he said. "Sure, the divorce rate is rising, but it's still very low—about twenty per cent. And that, of course, is why extramarital affairs in China are so common." The bureaucrats, he said, had presented him with an outline of their own, "acceptable" version of the script, but it was so dry and didactic that he refused to go along with it. "I don't know what to do," he said, dropping his bravado. Then, as if suddenly realizing that he was talking to a Western journalist, he added, "I've tried so carefully to avoid making them angry."

A MONTH later, on the eve of Wang Shuo's first publication in English, I caught up with him in New York. We met, again with an interpreter, at a coffee bar in SoHo; I had coffee, and he ordered nothing. His visit to America had been sobering: an attack of gout had reduced him to a diet of water, fish, and vegetables. His trip had begun in Los Angeles—Raymond Chandler's town—and he planned to return there soon. "New York is too much fun," he said. "I can't get any work done here."

He said he was writing a screenplay based on one of his most highly regarded novels, "Please Don't Consider Me Human." A wide-ranging satire, it is set in a cloud-cuckoo China governed by a politburo of hoodlums who choose a cabdriver to defend the nation's honor in a vicious mock-Olympics. First, the hero is castrated. Then, in order to win, he flays his cheeks—a savage sendup of China's obsession with saving face. Since it was now impossible for Wang to film the story in China, he said that he had transformed the script. "I have made the main character God," he explained. "What if God came to New York but the New Yorkers didn't recognize him—gave him a hard time and castrated him?" In the script, God is embodied by a fat, bald middle-aged man. Wang added slyly, "But now God is having his revenge, by giving me gout."

Did this project mean that he intended to stay in America for a while? I asked. Yes, he replied—although he would miss his family. He said that he had no intention of returning to China for the next few years, by which time he expected things in Beijing to have improved. "The government goes in cycles," he said. "When they think that the people have too much freedom, they're strict, but when they think that the people are unhappy they loosen up." He managed a reasonable approximation of a New York shrug. "I will go to L.A. and try to shoot my films. If that doesn't work out, I may go to Hong Kong. Or I may go to Singapore." Then, sounding very much like a child of the Cultural Revolution who is used to seeing the world turned upside down, he added with a smile, "But, really, if you ask me what I'll be doing two months from now, I have no idea." ♦



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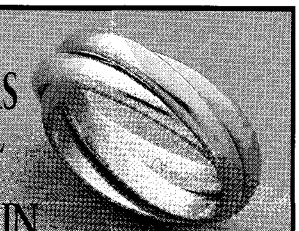

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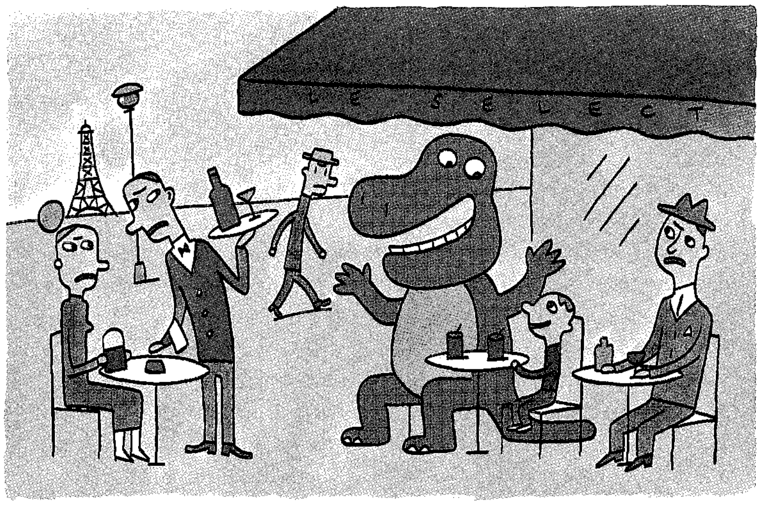
PARIS JOURNAL

APPOINTMENT WITH A DINOSAUR

An expatriate parent confronts the inevitable.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

WHEN people ask why my wife and I, not long after the birth of our first child, left New York for Paris, we can usually think of a lot of plausible-sounding reasons. They vary in tone from the high-mindedly agonized (we couldn't endure the malling of our SoHo neighborhood) to the cloyingly whimsical (we wanted to live within walking distance of the Gérard Mulot bakery, on the Rue de Seine). The real reason was Barney. We had seen one after another of our friends' children—charming children of parents who parse Greek texts or write long metafictions set in the eighteenth century—sunk dumbly in front of a television set watching a man in a cheap purple dinosaur suit sing doggerel in an adenoidal voice with a chorus of over-regimented eight-year-old ham actors. Just a glimpse was enough to scare a prospective parent to death: the garish Jeff Koons colors, the frantic prancing, the cynically appropriated public-domain melodies. And, finally, that anthem of coercive affection—"I love you / you love me / we're a happy family"—sung, so incongruously, to the tune of "This Old Man."



PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

The experienced reader will know, of course, that Barney stands here for the whole of American kiddie-video culture. The experienced reader, though, is wrong. We looked forward to introducing our newborn child, Luke, to Bugs and Bullwinkle and Bert and Ernie, and even Steve and Norm on "This Old House." We just couldn't bear the idea of his watching Barney. The only way, we thought, to be sure that he wouldn't was to pack up everything we had and move to another country.

So, Paris. "We want him to grow up someplace where everything he sees is beautiful," we said, and though we realized that the moment our backs were turned our friends' eyes were rolling, we didn't care. We knew that our attempt to insist on a particular set of pleasures for our kid—to impose a childhood on our child—might be silly or inappropriate or even doomed. We couldn't help it, entirely. The romance of your child's childhood may be the last romance you can give up.

In our first week in our new home on the Left Bank, we were awakened early one morning by loud, oddly fugitive organ music—it sounded like a carrousel, yet seemed to be moving closer. We opened the long French windows, looked out—and there was an honest-to-God organ-grinder coming along the street, "La Ronde" playing as he turned the crank on his hand-painted hurdy-gurdy. I found a ten-franc piece and threw it down to the street; Luke applauded, the organ-grinder caught it with one hand and cheerily, nattily, tipped his cap. Things looked good.

That first year, we went to a lot of circuses; in Paris there are usually six or seven in residence. We saw the Moreno-Bormann family circus, which is a true family circus: when any performer does anything slightly dangerous, the rest of the family stand around the ring calling out "Careful!" under their breath and averting their eyes. We also saw the Mongolian National Circus, in a little tent pitched at the Arsenal. It consists of six broad-faced, smiling Mongolians, who do circus tricks appropriate to a nomadic scarcity economy—they eat a *little bit* of fire, walk on *one* broken bottle and save the shards—and finish off with an elaborate, pointless, thirty-minute trick using a magician's cabinet that must have been left in Mongolia by an American illusionist sometime around 1860. (A Mongolian girl gets in the cabinet; Mongolian circus members slowly slide the swords through the slots; spend twenty minutes removing the swords from the slots; and then the girl gets out.)

We went to a lot of parks and rode a lot of carrousels. In the Luxembourg Gardens, for instance, there is an extraordinarily beautiful wooden carrousel, with horses and zebras and elephants, most of them nicely missing tusks and hooves and noses. But there is no music, and though each child is handed a stick with which to joust for brass rings, there are no prizes—not even a free ride. The kids have to be at least two and a half years old to ride a wooden animal (otherwise, they are crowded into a couple of little chariots), and the rule is strictly enforced. The carrousel *gardiens* actually card the children.

Just five yards from this desperately formal carrousel, and within easy, yelping earshot, is a completely unsupervised playground that's run on lines inspired by the last chapter of "Lord of the Flies." There is a spinning red platter onto which little children are thrown by bigger ones, who whip it around, with the terrified little ones kept from flying off by sheer centripetal force. There is a weird, ski-lift-style conveyance that kids cling to with their fingers, dangling ten feet in the air over nothing but hard pavement. There are jungle gyms the kids climb on, to be knocked off the top bars by informal gangs of larger kids. There is not a safety belt, a padded surface, or a liability lawyer anywhere to be found. (Twenty years ago, my wife and I, on our first date, saw Truffaut's "Small Change." We loved the sequence in which a child falls out of a sixth-story window and walks away unhurt. In our early Francophile moments, we saw this as charming French fantasy. In fact, it was pure cinéma vérité. Luke attends a weekly gym class for two-year-olds, along with heartbreakingly exquisite little girls named Amandine and Jolie and Neige. The children are routinely sent leaping from high, splintery boards onto low, uncushioned ones.)

At dusk, however, a uniformed *surveillant* emerges from a windowless shed at the center of the Gardens and blows a whistle, and everyone goes home. The child who has his hands around your child's throat lets go, helps him up, dusts off his *tablier*, takes his mother's hand, and trudges toward the gates. The vicious big kids help the terrified small kids off the spinning red platter. The play routine at the Gardens explains French history: the restrictive Old Regime, represented by the carrousel, leads to the anarchy of the Revolution and the Reign of Terror, represented by the playground; then Napoleon emerges in uniform to blow his whistle and call everybody to order. (Or it could be the Occupation, the Fourth Republic, and de Gaulle emerging in uniform.) Between the carrousels and the circuses and a wealth of Charlie Chaplin movies, to which Luke developed a deep, sober attachment, we seemed, blessedly, to have skipped right past the "B"s.

THEN, last Christmas, we went back to New York for three days. A friend brought a pile of tapes for a jet-lagged Luke to watch in the bedroom while we had dinner. I should have guessed from the ominous, atypical silence coming from the bedroom that something was off. Scooping up my exhausted little boy at the end of the evening, I noticed that he was looking unusually withdrawn. Then, right there in the back seat of a New York City taxicab, he suddenly looked up and said quietly, "Daddy, I like Barney."

"You like *what*?" I said.

"I like Barney," he said, and he turned over and went to sleep. The next morning, we broke down and let him watch the video again—we were pretty jet-lagged, too—and that was enough. It was like what they used to tell you about heroin: one taste, and you're hooked for good.

"I want Barney," he would announce

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early in the morning. He began to *whine* for Barney: "I want Barney, I want Barney." When we got back to Paris (the tapes somehow got into our bags), the need for Barney went right on. It even got worse. We'd be trying to watch one of the long, thoughtful French things that are good for your soul and your French—"Bouillon de Culture" or "Droit d'Auteurs," or even just the dubbed version of "NYPD Blue" (*"Ah, c'est un boulot difficile, ce travail de policier, Inspecteur Sipowicz"*)—and Luke would appear with a Barney tape. We had fled to Paris to escape our appointment with Barney, and Barney had come to meet us there.

Not wanting to be a bad or unduly coercive parent, I thought, Well, he has a right to his pleasures, but I, too, have a right—indeed, a duty—to tell him what I think of them. We began to have a regular daily exchange.

"Daddy, I *like* Barney," he would say with elaborately feigned nonchalance, coming into my office first thing in the morning.

"Well, I don't like Barney," I would say, frankly.

"You like B.J.?" he would ask, tauntingly. B.J. is one of Barney's even more inane and adenoidal sidekicks.

"I love Ernie and Bert," I would say, trying to put a positive spin on my position. "I love the carrousel. I love the circus. I love Charlie Chaplin."

"*I* like Barney," he would begin again, and it would go on.

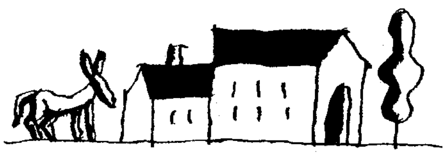
Naturally, it occurred to us that the pro-Barney campaign was a resourceful and in many ways courageous and admirable show of independence on the part of a two-and-a-half-year-old who might otherwise have been smothered by his parents' overbearing enthusiasms. We put up minimal Barney resistance. More tapes arrived from America, more tapes got popped in and played.

We tried to be tolerant, but Barney takes his toll: the braying voice, the crude direction, the inane mummery of the dancing, the witlessness of the writing. Our dreamed-of Parisian life was becoming unendurable. One afternoon around four-thirty, I wandered into the bedroom, where the television is. My wife was, uncharacteristically, drinking a glass of red wine. On the little screen, Barney was leading all the kids in one more rousing chorus of "I love you / you love me." We finished the bottle of burgundy together. On the screen Barney sang, and our son moved his lips in time.

WHAT puzzled me, of course, was why. Loving Barney in Paris was partly a way of teasing his parents, but it was not *simply* a way of teasing his parents; it was too deep, too emotional for that. Nor had Barney yet crossed the ocean, so it wasn't any kind of peer pressure from the French kids he played with in class and in the courtyard every day. In Paris, in fact, almost all the childhood icons are those which have been in place for forty years: stuffy, bourgeois Babar; conniving, witty Astérix and Obélix; and imperturbable Lucky Luke, the Franco-American cowboy in perpetual battle with the four Dalton brothers. Although these characters from time to time appear in cartoons, they remain locked in their little worlds of satire and storytelling. There is no Barney in France, and there is no French Barney. Whatever spell was working on my son, it was entirely, residually, American.

There are certain insights that can come to an American only when he is abroad, because only there does the endless ribbon of American television become segmented enough so that you can pay attention to its parts, instead of just being overwhelmed by the relentlessness of its presence. In the middle of the winter, I happened to see, during some stray roundup of the year's events on CNN International, a clip of another familiar American figure, his arms around his wife and child, swaying and humming as he watched fireworks going off. Suddenly, I got it: the nose; the rocking motion; above all, the squinty-eyed, aw-shucks, just-a-big-lug smile—Barney is Bill Clinton for three-year-olds. Or, rather, Bill Clinton is Barney for adults. He serves the same role for jumpy American liberals that Barney does for their children: he reassures without actually instructing. The physical resemblance alone is eerie. There's the odd combination of *hauteur* and *rondeur* (both are very tall without really being imposing), the perpetually swaying body, the unvarying smile, even the disconcerting chubby thighs—everything but the purple skin. Barney and Bill are not amiable authority figures, like the Friendly Giant and Ronald Reagan. They are, instead, representations of pure need: wanting to be hugged, they hug.

For the first time, I also understood Clinton-hating, of the violent irrational kind that, when I left America, was being practiced on the editorial page of the *Times* and in *The New Republic*, and had always seemed incomprehensible, directed, as it was, at so anodyne a character. Suddenly I saw that the psychology of the Clinton hater was exactly that of the Barney basher: the objections were not moral but peevishly aesthetic. Like Barney, Bill stripped away our pet illusions by showing just how much we could do without. We had persuaded ourselves that the modern child needed irony, wit, humor, parody to be reached and affected; "Sesame Street" and "Bullwinkle" were our exhibits in this argument. Barney showed that this was not the case. At the same time, we had persuaded ourselves that the modern citizen, similarly wary (he is, after all, merely the "Bullwinkle" viewer grown old), could be recalled to liberalism only through a heightened, self-conscious, soul-searching high-mindedness. Bill showed that *this* was not the case. Both dinosaur and Arkansas governor had discovered that the way to win the hearts of their countrymen was to reduce their occupation to its most primitive form. Where Kermit the Frog, on "Sesame Street," had sung the principle of brotherhood to children through the poetic metaphor of his own greenness, Barney just grabbed the kids and told them that he loved them and that they loved him, too, damn it. Where Mario Cuomo had orated about Lincoln and the immigrants and the metaphor of family, Bill Clinton just held out his arms and watched people leap into them. It turns out that you don't need to be especially witty or wise to entertain children, just as you don't need to believe in anything much to be an extremely effective President. All you need is to know your audience's insecurities and how to keep swaying in time to them forever.



WE had kept Barney in quarantine, for the most part, and though Neige and Jolie and Amandine passed through the house, it was mostly to sing lovely French songs—"Pomme de Reinette" and "Frère Jacques"—and play with

Luke's puppet theatre. Then we decided to hold a party to celebrate the coming of spring, and I went out to Mulot to get a four-part chocolate cake. When I came back to the apartment, half an hour later, the roomful of lively children whom I had left drawling in haute French was silent. They were all in the bedroom. I walked in—no cuckolded husband can ever have entered his own bedroom with more dread about what he would find there—and saw the three girls spread out on the bed, their crinolines beautifully plumped, their eyes wide, their mouths agape. Barney was in France, and the kids were loving him. The three perfect French children looked on, hardly able to understand the language, yet utterly transfixed. I held out cake. Nothing doing. Barney was swaying. B.J. was prancing. The kids on the show were mugging like crazy, and everyone was singing.

It was too late. "How do you sing that 'I loove you, you loove me'?" Amandine asked haltingly, in French, when the program ended.

"I love you, you love me," Jolie answered swiftly.

"Happy family," Luke prompted. For the next week, the song resounded from the street the way "La Ronde" had, long before.

A COUPLE of weeks later, at breakfast, Luke made an announcement. "Daddy," he said, "I *don't* like Barney."

"You don't like Barney?" I asked, incredulous, delighted.

"No, I *don't* like Barney." He paused. "I like to *watch* Barney."

He had stumbled, in a Barneycentric manner, on the essential formula that could be applied to almost every American spectacle: I don't like the O. J. Simpson trial, I like to *watch* the O. J. Simpson trial; I don't like Geraldo Rivera, I like to *watch* Geraldo Rivera. And, most basic of all: I don't like television, I like to *watch* television. When he watches Barney now, it's with a look in his eye that I know too well, and that I can only call the American look, the look of someone who, though he has seen right through it, still can't take his eyes away—one of us, despite it all. ♦

HEADLINE OF THE WEEK

[*From the Santa Fe New Mexican*]

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE PROTECTOR

There's an untold story of why Nicholas Scoppetta is so convinced that his crusade to save the abused children of New York will succeed.

BY DALE RUSSAKOFF

EARLY in the afternoon of March 21, 1996, a little boy was abandoned by his mother in a Brooklyn Toys R Us. He said his name was Jonathan Adams; his mother had parked him near the Power Rangers display and told him to wait. For hours, the store paged the mother, and police officers searched the city for her. By closing time, Jonathan, in green-blue-and-red Power Rangers pants, with his socks slouching into his sneakers, was still waiting. He fell asleep at the city's child-welfare agency, as clerks and social workers processed him as a victim of neglect. At 2:30 A.M., a city caseworker carried him into the home of a foster mother in the Bronx. He had become one of New York's forty-two thousand foster children.

That foster home is where Nicholas Scoppetta, four months later, met Jonathan. Scoppetta was the new Commissioner of New York's child-welfare agency, the Administration for Children's Services. As a former prosecutor with more than a dozen years of government experience, Scoppetta had practice at handling the media, and he intended to use it to sustain a crusade for reform born of a particularly horrible child-abuse case—the torture and 1995 beating death of a six-year-old whose plight had been known in advance to dozens of public and private agencies.

Jonathan Adams was, by comparison, an easy case, and a minor one. Despite having been abandoned, he was unharmed, and he seemed to have been nurtured by relatives. Authorities simply needed to track down his mother to begin the process of finding him a permanent home, lest he remain stranded indefinitely in foster care—one of the realms where New York's child-welfare system was failing children.

Scoppetta petitioned court authorities to allow Jonathan to appear on television. The media strategy worked as planned. Television stations broadcast heartstring-plucking stories of the adorable boy abandoned in a New York toy store, and newspaper headlines like "WHERE'S MOMMY?" appeared with pictures of Jonathan gazing solemnly into the camera. The mother, Tamekka Adams, was found in South Carolina, where she had moved to live with a boyfriend after leaving Jonathan. Tamekka Adams was nineteen years old. In Brooklyn Superior Court, she pleaded guilty to criminal charges of abandonment and endangering the welfare of a child.

While these events were unfolding, something unexpected happened between Scoppetta and Jonathan. Moments after they met, the day before the filming, Scoppetta was on the living-room floor in Jonathan's foster home, playing and coloring pictures with him like a pal, except that this particular pal was a man in his sixties, bald and wearing a tie. Jonathan, who had just turned five, crawled into Scoppetta's lap in no time. The next day, Scoppetta turned up for the television shoot, in Central Park. The cameras filmed Jonathan playing on swings, and laughing in the Commissioner's arms.

What touched Scoppetta most, he later said, was the boy's skill at winning the hearts of adults—any adults. "He was so socialized you were alerted immediately that something was wrong," Scoppetta told me.

Scoppetta couldn't get the boy out of his mind. He carried pictures of Jonathan in his wallet. He still keeps them and has passed them around at speeches to show, in his words, "why we're here." He told his wife, Susan, that he felt as if he wanted to adopt the boy, which Susan Scoppetta, a psychotherapist, called "scary" but understandable: "It was a child of a similar age—a five-year-old boy."

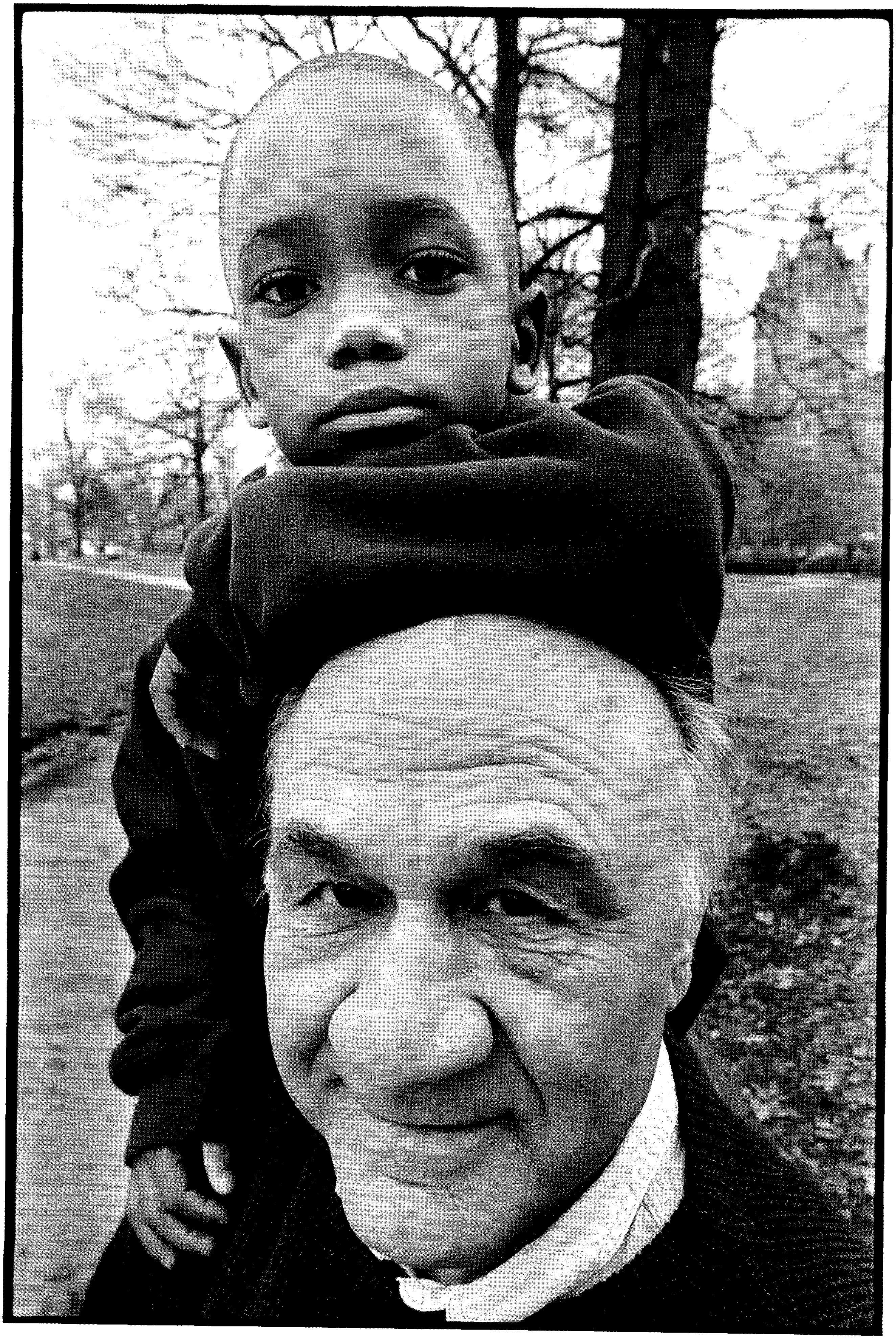
Similar, that is, to Scoppetta's age when he himself became a foster child. In 1937, he and his two older brothers, Anthony and Vincent, were removed from their parents' tenement in Little Italy as victims of neglect and placed in the first of several institutions where they would live for the next six years. Scoppetta recognized Jonathan's social skills as the ones he had developed. He once told me that he has "antennae" for what people want of him, and knows instinctively how to win them over, and that this began as a protective reflex to keep from being hurt. He said he also finds himself identifying with other children in the system.

The enterprise of overhauling this broken agency thus has a running, deeply personal subplot: the self-examination of the foster child who became the Commissioner. On one level, Scoppetta seems at peace with his past. Standing at lecterns, dressed in muted blues and grays, he runs public hearings with all the skill of the accomplished lawyer that he is. At times, he even reduces his own history to a laugh line: "I was in foster care when I was five, and here I am almost sixty years later and I'm still in foster care."

In private, though, Scoppetta is rarely unemotional. He has a classically Italian face, an outsized nose, and unusually shiny brown eyes. When stories about children affect him, his eyes moisten and his low, husky voice catches. He frequently talks about his wife and their two grown children, Andrea, a social worker, and Eric, an assistant district attorney, even to people he has just met—as if he were amazed that he has a real family.

In recent weeks, there has been more than enough to be emotional about. On March 29th, Daytwon Bennett, a five-year-old, who was supposed to be under close supervision by one of Scoppetta's caseworkers, died in the Bronx after being starved and tortured, apparently by his mother, who had a long history of abusing her children. A few days later, Cassandra White, a seven-year-old in Harlem,

"My wife calls this job my unfinished business." Scoppetta with foster child Jonathan Adams. Photograph by Bruce Davidson. MAGNUM



was seriously burned after allegedly being forced to sit on a hot radiator by her mother, Rhonda White, who also was supposedly under agency supervision. The two cases raised questions about Scoppetta's capacity to change the agency. He acknowledged that caseworkers may have mishandled the White case and pledged to investigate and make a public accounting of it and similar failures. "The events of the past week are a pretty sad, grim reminder of how challenging, how difficult this road will be," he said. They were also a reminder that part of the challenge is the fundamental right of Americans to rear their own children. Every day, courts return children to biological parents; and, inevitably, some of these children will be in jeopardy.

For a man assigned to deal with so much misery, Scoppetta is remarkably upbeat. Part of this no doubt comes from a belief that he has arrived at the agency at a moment of historic opportunity. But there is also this: the job, Scoppetta says, is "such a wonderful emotional fit." It is jarring at first to hear him relate his job to his own needs, in light of the needs of his charges, but it is also a measure of how much his past still consumes him.

LAST fall, at the Women's City Club, Scoppetta was describing the responsibility of caseworkers who must take children from their families in the name of safety: "Imagine being four or five and someone coming into the house and saying, 'I've received a report of neglect and I have substantiated it and you're coming with me,' " he said. "It's a stunning thing to contemplate, isn't it?" After that speech, he remarked, "It's interesting that some people have called this job my 'mission.' My wife calls it my unfinished business."

It is also the nation's. Child abuse and neglect were identified as a national problem in the nineteen-sixties by Vincent J. Fontana, the medical director of the New York Foundling Hospital. And the problem remains one that overwhelms every system erected to address it. In 1995, the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse counted more than three million reports of abuse and neglect in the United States, compared with two million in 1986, when its research began; it also counted twelve hundred and fifteen reported fatalities—more than three a day. The same three syndromes are associated with these deaths, according to child-welfare agencies: single parenthood, poverty, and substance abuse.

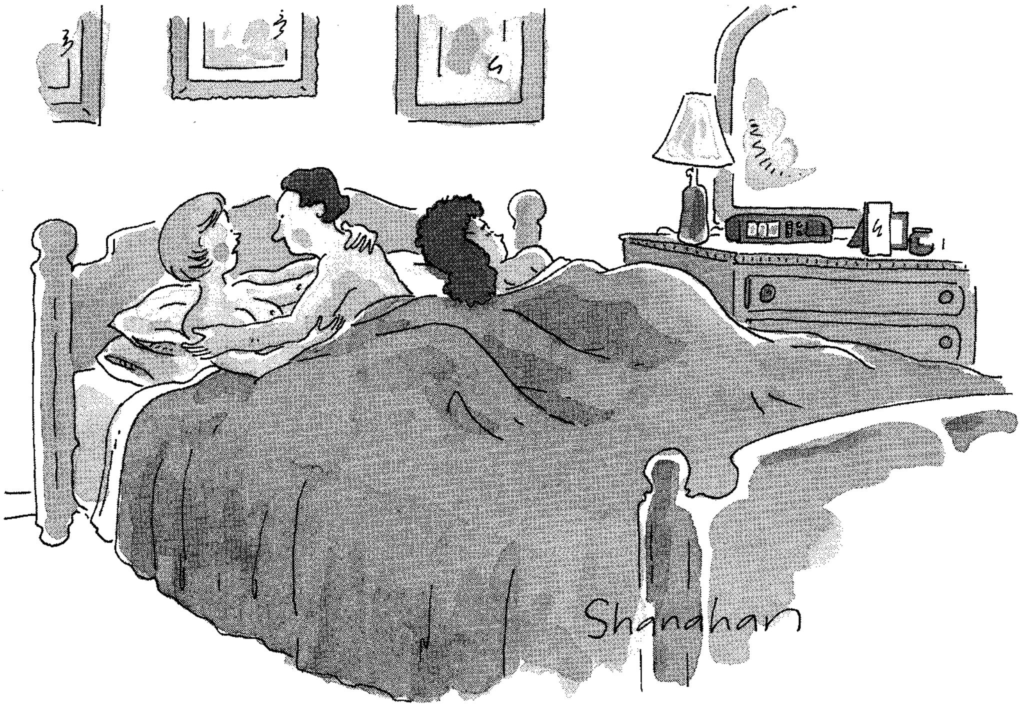
Such statistics only suggest what the agencies face. In Bedford-Stuyvesant seven years ago, a girl named Twenika was placed in foster care in the hope that her crack-addicted mother would get off drugs and regain custody of her. "So many times, we came so close to going home," Twenika, who is now nineteen, said to me. But her mother relapsed each time. Now Twenika is about to "age out" of the system, taking along her own daughter, a three-year-old, and the two have no family to go home to.

The latest shipment of Twenikas—children removed from troubled families—arrives each night at the agency's Emergency Children's Services office, which is located above a computer store on Laight Street in Lower Manhattan. In a dimly lit room, where the children wait for emergency placement in a foster home, they walk back and forth on scuffed floors, occasionally flopping in front of a television. One January night, there were six of them, from a toddler to a thirteen-year-old, and they all seemed strangely at ease. "For some of them it's not so scary," a caseworker explained. "They've been here before."

Like the families it attempts to help, New York's child-welfare system is often described as "abused," "neglected," and "dysfunctional." Very little has worked as it was meant to, beginning at a door to the agency's headquarters at 80 Lafayette Street, where the handle reads "Push" but you have to pull. Just inside are two elevators that chug glacially up and down eighteen floors, when they budge at all. One of them is usually stationary; a scraped and faded sign apologizes that it is "temporarily" out of order.

Nothing more clearly symbolizes the neglect of the agency than the working conditions of its thousand protective caseworkers, who are paid salaries as low as $27,744 to carry out investigations in the city's most dangerous neighborhoods. On the basis of evidence that is often unclear, they must decide whether a child is safe with its family. Turnover among the caseworkers has been as high as fifty per cent a year, with many defectors fleeing to the Department of Probation—where they are paid two thousand six hundred dollars more to work with prisoners than they were paid to work with children and families. "Child-welfare caseworkers go to poor neighborhoods to deal with people already dismissed by society as leftovers," said Cyprian Belle, Jr., who started out as a caseworker thirty-one years ago and now directs the agency's Brooklyn office. "So the thinking is, We'll give you leftover pay."

For years, conditions for caseworkers were so poor that there was no one to take messages for



"I think that just my being here is a big mistake."

them when they were out in the field; calls about children in danger went unanswered, unless co-workers happened to pick up the phones. They were perpetually out of notebooks, paper clips, and the state forms that have to be filed continually on each child’s status. There were twenty-six separate computer systems but none providing up-to-date notes on tens of thousands of children and families under the agency’s supervision. In the age of the CD-ROM, notes were still written by hand and filed in manila folders—folders that had long ago filled up the available file cabinets and were stacked in precarious piles on floors and under desks. It could take weeks for a caseworker in Brooklyn to retrieve a file on a family that had just moved from the Bronx—if the file could be located. Sometimes, thousands of folders were missing, and that meant that children went unmonitored.

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AGAINST this backdrop, the bludgeoning death of six-year-old Elisa Izquierdo, in November of 1995, set off a public crusade. Day after day, newspaper and television reports revealed the dozens of lost opportunities to save Elisa. Her case was known not only to the child-welfare authorities but also to the Brooklyn Family Court, a legal-services agency, four community social-services programs, at least two drug-rehabilitation programs in which her mother participated, a preschool, a public school, a school-based therapy program, at least two psychiatric hospitals, several general hospitals, a pediatrician, several relatives, and others. “We are all accountable,” Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said after Elisa’s funeral.

Giuliani attended the funeral, a measure of the impact of her death. The crusade spread to the state legislature, and it passed what was called Elisa’s Law, relaxing confidentiality rules that had had the effect of shielding child-welfare officials from public scrutiny. In early 1996, Giuliani announced that New York would take radical steps to reform its system. In the midst of a fiscal crisis, during which he had earlier cut a number of abuse-prevention programs, he promised to deliver to New Yorkers “the best child-protection services in the nation.”

Giuliani said he wanted to turn child welfare around as his administration had turned the Police Department around, and he looked to the same talent pool: law-enforcement experts. He called on his Investigation Commissioner, then Howard Wilson, to analyze why the child-welfare system had chronically failed. Giuliani recruited John Linder, a management consultant credited with helping reëngineer the Police Department. He separated the billion-two-hundred-million-dollar-a-year Child Welfare Administration from the seven-billion-dollar-a-year Human Resources Administration and renamed it the Administration for Children’s Services. The new agency would report directly to the Mayor; any lapses in the protection of children would be his to answer for from now on.

To lead the agency, Giuliani chose Nicholas Scoppetta. Scoppetta had been a deputy mayor and had twice been the city’s Investigation Commissioner. He had made his name in the nineteen-seventies with his work as a prosecutor for the Commission to Investigate Alleged Police Corruption, known as the Knapp Commission—which generated cases Giuliani helped to prosecute as an assistant United States attorney. Giuliani, a Republican, also made it clear that he was appointing Scoppetta, a Democrat, because of Scoppetta’s own history.

The appointment was cheered by the discouraged community of nonprofit children’s-services agencies that work on contract for the city. The reaction of Vincent Fontana of the Foundling Hospital was not unusual: “People said to me in the past, How can you go on all these years, trying to save children’s lives, knowing the system isn’t working? Well, you just do, hoping something like this will happen.”

On December 19, 1996, ten and a half months after Scoppetta took the job, he and Giuliani issued “Protecting the Children of New York,” an ambitious reform plan that was highly critical of the old system. There were obvious parallels with Police Department strategy: there would be clearly stated “outcomes,” such as moving foster children more quickly to permanent homes, against which the performance of caseworkers, the agency, and contract foster-care providers would be measured. There would be rigorous oversight of casework. Like the Police Department’s vow to “take back the streets, block by block,” the document had a brash mission statement: “To stop the killing, abuse, and neglect of children in New York City and to make certain that the lives of victimized children are measurably improved."

Scoppetta is inclined to optimism, especially on the subject of government and its capacity for doing good. The government saved him as a child, sent him to college and law school, and awarded him job after job as he built his legal career. Of the task now facing him, Scoppetta said, "It's big, it's complicated, it's going to take a lot of time. But it certainly can be done. Absolutely, unequivocally can be done."

Still, New York had been here many times before, and had little to show for it. For decades, crusades to save the city's children had been formed in reaction to child-abuse deaths. Over the years, dozens of reports had analyzed ways to fix the system: improve the training, management, and pay of child-welfare workers, and decentralize their work; reduce caseloads; computerize case files. All these measures could be found again in the blueprint produced by Scoppetta. But apart from the names of the agency's heads (there had been twelve in the previous twenty-three years) and the name of the agency itself (from Bureau of Child Welfare to Special Services for Children and then to Child Welfare Administration) little else has changed.

In 1985, after the deaths of nine children supposedly under the agency's supervision, a commission appointed by Mayor Edward I. Koch wrote, "Since 1966, there have been six major attempts to reorganize [the agency] in whole or in part. . . . none of these moves has been entirely satisfactory." Neither was the 1985 report, which was largely ignored. In 1990, Mayor David Dinkins hired hundreds of new caseworkers, only to lay off more than three hundred of them in a budget crisis two years later.

Marcia Robinson Lowry, a veteran children's advocate, predicts that Scoppetta's reform effort will be merely the latest chapter in this dismal history. Lowry, whose organization has filed a class-action lawsuit seeking to transfer control of the agency to a court-appointed monitor, agrees with Scoppetta's analysis of the system's failings. She even called him "the most articulate, certainly the shrewdest and best connected of anyone to run the agency since I've been looking at it." But after taking hundreds of pages of depositions from his agency officials she said she sees no evidence that he can bring about the changes he seeks. "I think he and the Mayor have overpromised the speed with which they're going to get reform. I think they've underestimated the depth of the problem," she said. A number of children's advocates have been complaining that Scoppetta has not brought enough dissenting voices into his planning efforts—that he is missing an opportunity to unite all forces in the child-welfare community, even those which regularly sue his agency.

The agency has been unprepared, decade after decade, for large social changes. Through the nineteen-forties, the city placed all foster children through private agencies, most with religious affiliations. But in the nineteen-fifties, as black children poured into what had been a largely white system, the private agencies widely resisted placing them. The result was a "boarder baby" crisis at hospitals to which black mothers had surrendered their infants.

Starting in the mid-seventies, when the foster-care population swelled, federal and state policymakers expanded services designed to protect children at home. As a result, the number of New York City children in foster care dropped from twenty-four thousand in 1975 to seventeen thousand in 1986, only to collide with the crack epidemic, which sent the foster-care population up to almost fifty thousand by 1992. This produced another generation of boarder babies—cocaine-addicted newborns backed up in hospitals.

As the crack epidemic ebbed, the number of children in foster care in New York fell; it stands now at forty-one thousand six hundred. But babies—many of them testing positive for drugs at birth—remain the dominant new entrants. Meanwhile, the cycle of drug-related abuse and neglect continues. Euvonia Jackson, who was a child-welfare caseworker in Brooklyn in the mid-eighties and is now a supervisor, says she has discovered a number of new reports against mothers whose children she removed years ago for drug use. "Now they're AIDS patients, and the children are using drugs," Jackson said.

With each social crisis and each mayoral election, the agency's approach shifts. And with more than ninety per cent of the city's foster children now minorities, the changing ideology is inseparable from racial politics. In 1990, Mayor Dinkins expanded programs designed to keep at-risk children at home rather than in foster care. Giuliani shifted in the opposite direction after Elisa Izquierdo's death, saying, "The philosophy of child welfare has been too rigidly focused on holding families together" at the expense of protecting children. Scoppetta's position is more nuanced. "It's not whether you err on the side of protecting families or protecting children but whether you accurately assess the needs of the child and the family," he said to me while putting the final touches on his reform plan. "Caseworkers need to make a judgment based on what they see. If they fear accountability, they might err on being certain not to leave a child at risk. But this debate is a phony issue, and a specious one."

WHAT most distinguishes child welfare from law enforcement is that abuse and neglect, unlike lawbreaking, are rarely as easy to detect as they seem to have been in the cases of Daytwon or Elisa. More commonly, the risk is layered in ambiguity and conflicting evidence, with no margin for error if a caseworker misreads the signals.

So it seemed one night in late January when I accompanied a veteran caseworker named Jocelyn Jean-Philippe. (He then earned twenty-seven thousand dollars a year and had recently been honored as one of the city's best employees. A few weeks later, he was promoted to supervisor and now earns thirty-nine thousand dollars a year.) At about ten-thirty, we drove up to a housing project on the Lower East Side to check a report that a foster daughter, an eight-year-old, was being kept home from school because she had bruises on her head. This was a surprise visit, lest a call in advance prompt the foster mother to take the girl and run.

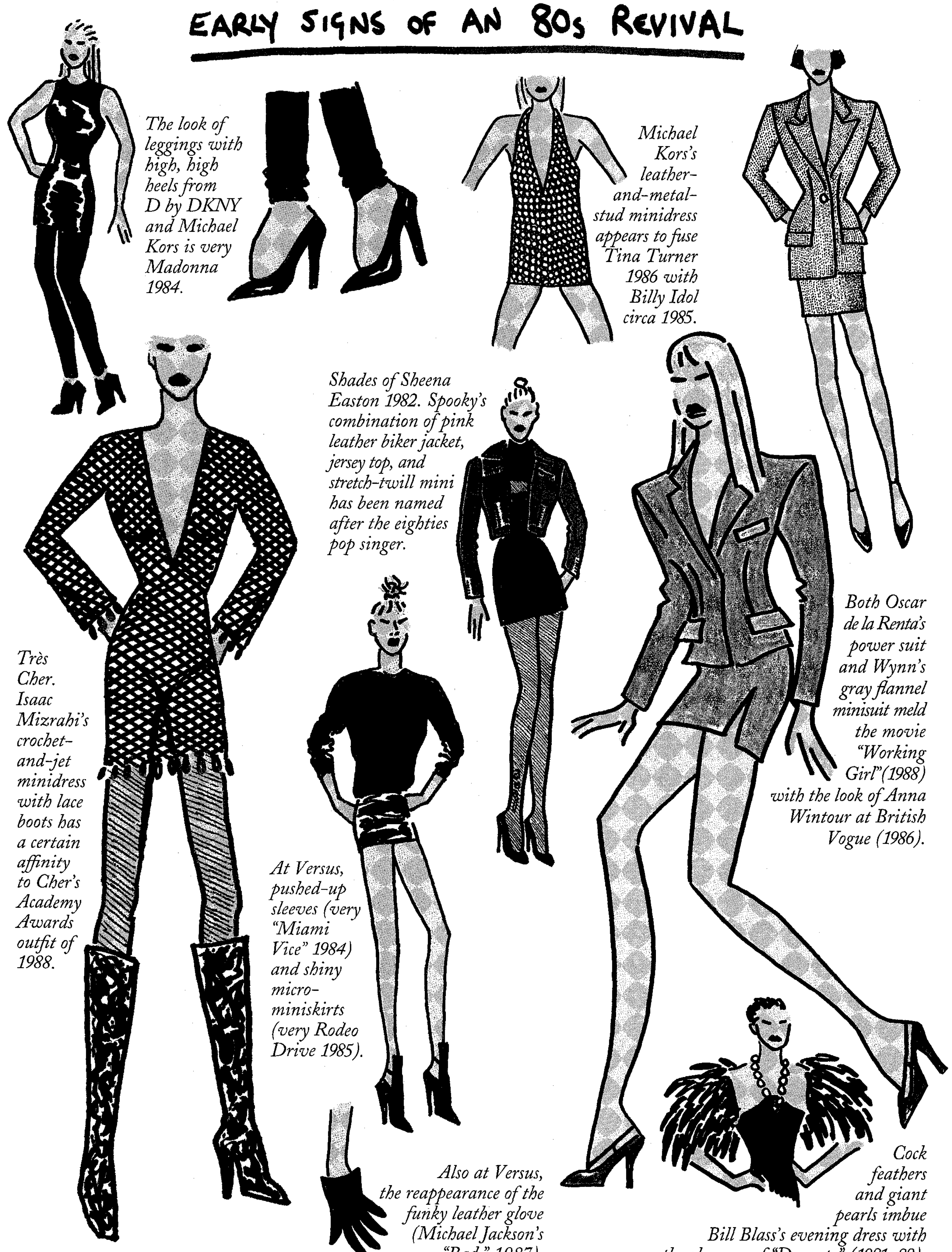
While Jean-Philippe was ringing the buzzer at the front entrance, three small boys bundled against the cold appeared from around the corner carrying window shades. They were out on their own, and none appeared to be older than nine. Jean-Philippe, who is thirty-six and looked authoritative in a sleek leather jacket, stared down at them reprovingly, wondering whether this, too, was a case he should be investigating.

"Why are you out so late?" he asked.

One boy said they had gone to his cou-

MICHAEL ROBERTS ON THE NEW YORK COLLECTIONS

EARLY SIGNS OF AN 80s REVIVAL



The look of leggings with high, high heels from D by DKNY and Michael Kors is very Madonna 1984.

Michael Kors's leather-and-metal-stud minidress appears to fuse Tina Turner 1986 with Billy Idol circa 1985.

Shades of Sheena Easton 1982. Spooky's combination of pink leather biker jacket, jersey top, and stretch-twill mini has been named after the eighties pop singer.

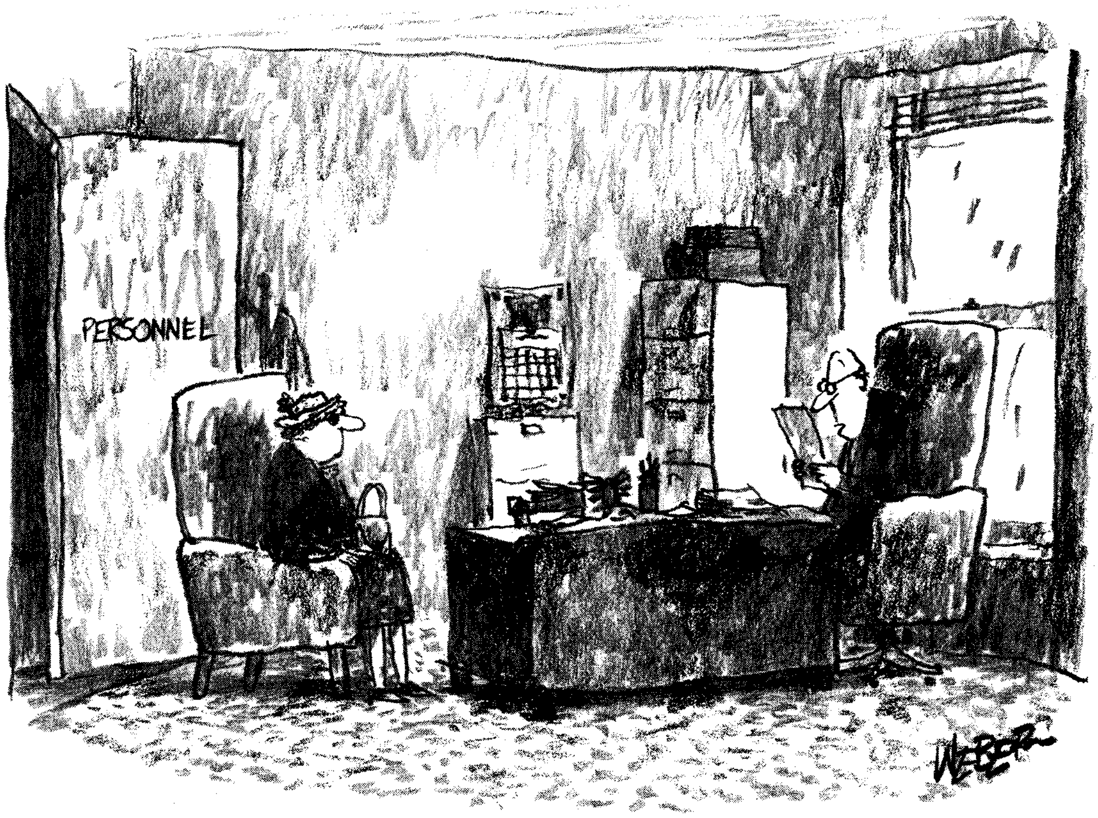
Both Oscar de la Renta's power suit and Wynn's gray flannel minisuit meld the movie "Working Girl" (1988) with the look of Anna Wintour at British Vogue (1986).

Très Cher. Isaac Mizrahi's crochet-and-jet minidress with lace boots has a certain affinity to Cher's Academy Awards outfit of 1988.

At Versus, pushed-up sleeves (very "Miami Vice" 1984) and shiny micro-miniskirts (very Rodeo Drive 1985).

Also at Versus, the reappearance of the funky leather glove (Michael Jackson's "Bad," 1987).

Cock feathers and giant pearls imbue Bill Blass's evening dress with the glamour of "Dynasty" (1981–89).



"This is incredible! I thought Amelia Earhart was dead."

sin's apartment several blocks away to pick up the shades for his mother.

"Isn't it late for a school night? Have you done your homework?"

"No."

One of the boys rang a buzzer. "Yeah?" answered a young woman's voice. "It's me, Mom," the boy said. The door buzzed open, allowing Jean-Philippe and me to slip inside, too. The boys were soon out of range, and the caseworker was on the elevator heading for the foster mother's apartment. But hanging in the air was the question of what awaited the boys in the apartment he wasn't visiting, and had no legal right to visit.

The foster mother invited him in as soon as he identified himself as being from B.C.W., or the Bureau of Child Welfare, the agency's name of twenty-five years ago. Most families in the system still know it by those initials—as if no name change, or reform, had ever made it to their level.

The woman spoke only Spanish, but Jean-Philippe, a Haitian, is fluent in Spanish, French, and his native Creole. She admitted freely that her foster daughter was badly bruised around her right eye but said she thought that the girl had fallen in the bathroom. She said that the child ran around too much and was hard to control. She was keeping her home from school, she said, because the child had a fever. Jean-Philippe asked to see the girl.

Two sisters and a brother were asleep in a pair of twin beds and a crib in a small bedroom. They looked cozy and safe. There were Ninja Turtle curtains, toys on top of the dresser, a closet full of children's clothes, and each child clutched a stuffed animal. Jean-Philippe noted to himself that this foster mother was spending her stipend for the benefit of the children.

So it was shocking when he pulled back the covers from the little girl in the pink pajamas—her long, golden hair mussed and a bit sweaty with sleep, her body relaxed in slumber—to reveal a right eye swollen and bruised from her forehead to her high cheekbone, where there was a scab the size of a nickel. Jolted from sleep, the girl began sobbing. The foster mother hugged and comforted her, and the girl hugged her back, calling her Mama.

Jean-Philippe asked the foster mother to leave the room. He sat on the girl's bed, asking softly, "What happened to your eye?" She refused to answer, through half an hour of coaxing. Then she relented, but agreed only to whisper. She said she was running a few days earlier, made a flying leap into her bed, and smashed into the corner of her dresser. She pointed to the spot. It was at exactly the height of her cheekbone. Jean-Philippe asked her in a dozen different ways if her foster mother ever hit her when she was mad. He woke up her brother and asked him, too. Both of them said no, never. He checked the rest of the apartment. The refrigerator was well stocked. Every room was clean and orderly. The foster mother was undefensive, showing him everything he asked to see.

He was still bothered by the conflicting stories—a fall in the bathroom versus a fall in the bedroom—but he observed to me later that the girl probably didn't tell the foster mother the whole truth, since they undoubtedly had conflicts over her running around the apartment. He told the foster mother to take the girl to a doctor to treat the shiner, and to send her back to school.

The case seemed fairly clear, but, as Jean-Philippe pointed out, there is always ambiguity. Every report on every child—and there are five thousand reports a month in New York City—comes down to a judgment call. "Everything is an emergency, even if it looks simple, like educational neglect," Jean-Philippe said. "Something could happen to that child tonight."

IN November of 1937, only days after his fifth birthday, Nicholas Scoppetta and his brothers were removed from their parents' tenement, on Mulberry Street. "Our parents split, my mother left, and we were left with our father" was the explanation he gave in our first interview. The father went to the docks every day, looking for work, and the three boys were home alone; Nicholas's older brothers stopped going to school. "Somebody looked into it, and we were all placed as neglected children," Scoppetta said.

He said he never knew why his mother left. "What reasons would a woman leave for?" he asked. "You can use your imagination." I asked if his older brothers knew more. At first, he told me that he did not want me to interview them. "I don't know if I'm trying to protect them or myself," he said, somewhat mysteriously.

Scoppetta has always been vague about the reasons he went into foster care. It is a measure of its toll that Scoppetta, though one of New York's more respected lawyers, a confidant of mayors, and a man with friends, money, and a loving family, still feels ashamed of his past. "You never really get over being in foster care," Scoppetta once told a small group of teen-age foster children—abuse and abandonment victims, children of addicts—who wondered how this man in an expensive suit could feel the way they did.

Scoppetta recalls almost nothing about his childhood before foster care. His older brother Vince, who is now seventy, told me, "Our parents were like Gypsies. They moved from Elizabeth Street to Spring Street to Sullivan Street in the Village, then Mulberry Street. I don't know why they even unpacked." Their father, Dominick Scoppetta, had come from Amalfi to open a produce stand with two brothers. But it went bust, the brothers returned home, and Dominick, who spoke little English and never became an American citizen, could find nothing but occasional day work at the docks.

Dominick and his wife, Margaret, who was a short, stout woman of enormous energy and terrifying rages, always seemed to be fighting over something, Vince recalled. He was never sure what, because they argued in Italian, usually "after my father would have a few too many glasses of wine," he said. His mother had one obvious soft spot—her "baby," Nicholas, whom she nurtured attentively. Tony Scoppetta, who is now sixty-seven, recalled, "She'd say, 'You're my little baby. You're my sweetheart,' to the point where it was embarrassing."

The brothers have few clear memories of their first months away from home—except of being afraid, confused, and separated most of the time. Nick Scoppetta vividly recalls a reunion with Vince at Woodycrest, his foster home, which was in the Bronx, across Jerome Avenue from Yankee Stadium.

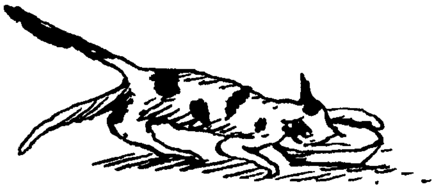
On the day he arrived, he was led through a sculpted entranceway, seated in a small, red-carpeted room, and told that someone was upstairs waiting to see him. "I remember being very intrigued by that. Who could want to see me?" Scoppetta said, as if reliving the moment. He was taken upstairs, where he remembers "a blaze of light cutting in front of the elevators, so bright I couldn't see. I just saw this figure there in silhouette." Scoppetta said he leaped into Vince's arms, crying. Vince told him that Tony was there, too.

"I grabbed him and hugged him," Vince said. "He was my little brother, my baby brother."

Woodycrest, a noblesse-oblige outpost of the American Female Guardian Society, had been designed by William Burnett Tuthill, the architect of Carnegie Hall. Past the grand entrance, with fluted columns, hung a sign with the message "Home for the Friendless." Those unintentionally mocking words amid splendor capture the dual meanings of Woodycrest to Scoppetta. "We had everything right there," he said. "It was a marvellous feeling—wide open, sunny, active. There was a sense of belonging there and to each other." Living so near Yankee Stadium gave a thrilling rhythm to every spring, summer, and fall, with crowds roaring, and the boys always wondering if Joe DiMaggio had homered.

Woodycrest, where the brothers spent five of their six years away from home, defines foster care for Scoppetta. All three brothers make it sound almost like a boarding school. Everyone was white and Protestant (Scoppetta said his mother had joined a Protestant church), and the place was thus typical of foster care at the time, which was segregated by race and religion. The staff mostly lived in. Everything was regimented. The boys wore knickers to school, and, starting at age five, made their own beds, with hospital corners. Each summer was spent at a camp on the New Jersey shore, where days were scheduled. For children who misbehaved, there were lashes with a strap.

Scoppetta, even then, was a standout. Allrich Geisweller, a dorm-mate, whose name is on a photograph that Scoppetta has saved, and with whom Scoppetta had had no contact since 1943, exclaimed into the phone when asked if he remembered a Nicholas Scoppetta, "Nicky Scoppetta? Always the Number One person! I always looked up to him—his demeanor, his way, just the way he handled himself. Only three kids were allowed to join the Boy Scouts. He was one of them." Scoppetta remembers feeling safe because he had big brothers as his protectors. But still, they were foster children, and they felt that fact acutely whenever they left Woodycrest. "Once we were on the outside, in school or anywhere else, we were marked as different," Scoppetta told me.



Scoppetta said that he rarely saw his father while he was at Woodycrest, but Margaret Scoppetta resurfaced, appearing once a month on visiting days. He remembers her visiting him and Tony once at summer camp and taking them to a boardwalk, and says that there he felt overcome by loneliness and sadness—"almost as though I was feeling the accumulated emotions of being put into Woodycrest." Again, his recollections were strikingly detailed: "The sun was going down, the light was coming in at a very sharp angle. . . . I had a few things I put on my bunk that I'd gotten on the boardwalk—little trinkets, little glass containers with snow in them. It all seemed so pathetic."

Scoppetta is also certain that Woodycrest "saved" him from the dead end he was born into. "I was made to feel special and smart, as though I had some real worth," he said. "When we came back home, I was made to feel very peculiar and odd, not valued, but strange, because of my interests. My hobbies were things like astronomy. They thought I was an odd duck. It was always overcoming instead of being supported."

In the summer of 1943, Margaret Scoppetta told the boys they would be coming home. From the airy elegance of Woodycrest, they arrived in a dark fourth-floor walkup in a Lower East Side tenement on Rivington Street, where they encountered three young men whom they had never met or heard of, but who appeared to feel quite at home—their own half brothers, it turned out, from Margaret Scoppetta's previous marriage. They, too, had been in foster care. Today, Scoppetta does not know whether his half brothers are still alive.

On Rivington Street, striking differences eventually emerged between Nick Scoppetta and the rest of his family. His half brothers were working, at their mother's insistence, to support the family, and Vince and Tony soon dropped out of school and did the same. "My mother really didn't care," Tony said. "The only thing she cared about was us going to work to kick in some money." Dominick Scoppetta was at home only for brief periods, punctuated by fights with his wife. Finally he moved out for good.

Scoppetta went to P.S. 188 and became a star student, being tracked into classes with the children of Jewish, Irish, and Italian immigrant strivers. Vince remembers coming home from work and finding Nick sitting on the stoop talking with a friend, Ralph Pelligra. "They'd be talking about things like what the world would be like forty or fifty years from now," Vince told me.

Pelligra, who is now a physician in California and is still close to Scoppetta, remembers talking mostly about girls and baseball, but he agreed that they were unlike many of their contemporaries, who hung out in street gangs, occasionally broke into buildings, and, in a few instances, ended up in jail. Pelligra was motivated by his father to break the pattern, but he told me he couldn't imagine what had inspired Scoppetta. "I tended to think of it as just native talents and native intelligence overcoming obstacles in the environment," Pelligra said.

The Manhattan Supreme Court Judge Harold Rothwax, who has been Scoppetta's close friend for forty years, told me it was typical of Scoppetta to seem "always to be seriously surprised at the life he has—as if none of it could be anticipated." But there was an explanation, Rothwax said: "It was something he aspired to," and, with his talent for attracting people, "everyone responded positively to him."

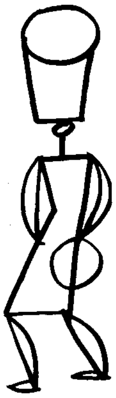
Scoppetta started at City College, tuition-free, but he was drafted for the Korean War and, as an Army corporal, was selected to teach a lecture course in communications equipment at Fort Benning, Georgia; there, he had hours of free time, which he spent in the library reading Wolfe, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and other American authors. "When I came home, I was a different person," he said. He went to Bradley University, in Peoria, on the G.I. Bill, and won a Regents Scholarship to Brooklyn Law School, where a friend told him of an opening for a job at the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children—the agency that had removed him in 1937. In that office, he came to know the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, where he was hired in 1962 and placed by Frank Hogan in the rackets bureau; in his six years there, he was known for his intellectual toughness and his tolerance for numbing detail in the most difficult cases. The law became his new identity, and he took to

MUSICAL CHEERS *When the cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich turned seve in Paris. Among those on hand (from left): Yehudi Menuhin, Jean-Pierre Rampal, Rostropo*

March 27th, three symphony orchestras, two choirs, and two dozen soloists serenaded him from the stage of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, 'ton John, Rostropovich's grandson Ivan, and Seiji Ozawa. Photograph by William Klein.

wearing Brooks Brothers suits to blend in with his well-born colleagues.

As he rose as a prosecutor, Scoppetta kept the story of his childhood mostly to himself. Robert Leuci, a policeman-informant who worked with Scoppetta on the Knapp Commission and then at the United States Attorney's office, told me that he'd been able to see Scoppetta's story in his face. "I thought somebody beat the shit out of this guy when he was a kid," Leuci said. "There's something about his expression that tells you he's lived a life. He hasn't been protected. He told me the story of his life. I wasn't surprised."



In 1972, Mayor John Lindsay, a Republican, named Scoppetta his Investigation Commissioner. He was reappointed to that post by Mayor Abraham Beame, a Democrat, and Beame also elevated him to deputy mayor for criminal justice and chairman of the Criminal Justice Coördinating Council. Scoppetta led an undercover probe of the city Buildings Department which produced indictments of a hundred and thirty-one extorting inspectors and bribe-giving real-estate figures.

Scoppetta started a private law practice in 1980 with Eric Seiff, a friend from the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. Around the same time, he became involved with the Children's Aid Society—not as an expert on children but as an expert on law enforcement. After chairing a study of the state juvenile-justice system, which ended up changing the state juvenile code, he was elected to the society's board of trustees. As he became still more involved, he was elected president and later chairman of the board.

Scoppetta's law practice earned him almost four hundred thousand dollars in 1995, but he told me that his success never seemed quite real. "Here I was in private practice, doing extremely well, making more money than I'd ever thought I'd see, in a lovely corner office on Madison Avenue," he said. "But there was always the sense that someone would come in the door and say, 'What are you doing there? You! In this corner office? *Out!*' "

SCOPPETTA said a number of times that he was frustrated by the many missing details in his past. And yet part of him wanted it that way. At one point, I told him that I had called the archivist of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and learned that records existed from the years when he was in foster care. I gave him the telephone number, assuming he would want to retrieve the file. He never did. "I thought, but I didn't resolve," he said, when I asked if he had called.

He later spotted me at a public hearing on his reform plan, and said, "I think I can explain why I didn't call about the file." He told me that he had feared all his life that the truth would ruin his reputation if it became public. He had kept it secret even from his closest friends.

"My mother was arrested," he told me over lunch a few days later. "That's why we went into foster care."

Scoppetta said he had never asked his mother about the circumstances of her arrest—"I wouldn't dare." Years later, Vince told him that a woman had falsely accused her of stealing public-assistance checks and forging a signature, and that she had slugged the woman in a rage, and was jailed for assault.

"Why I didn't raise it, why I started even concealing it is quite obvious, especially as a younger person," Scoppetta said. "And then it just became part of my story. When I was in government, I thought somebody might be interested in writing about it, and I didn't want to be the son of somebody who went to jail. It became part of the created history just to leave that out."

In the New York City Municipal Archives there is no mention of an assault, only a felony charge of forgery—the charge that Margaret Scoppetta had told Vince was a fiction. The only record of the case is in the handwritten minutes of the Court of General Sessions for November 8, 1937, two days after Nicholas Scoppetta's fifth birthday. On that day, Margaret Scoppetta pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of petit larceny—a misdemeanor—and was sentenced to ninety days in the Women's House of Detention. According to the minutes, the total theft by Margaret Scoppetta amounted to "a quantity of groceries of the value of $3.50 and the sum of $18.20 in money."

Scoppetta asked me to tell him what I discovered in the archives. When he learned that twenty-one dollars and seventy cents had determined the course of his life, his first response was a lawyerly analysis.

"It is a small amount of money, but the forgery changes it, particularly if it was a public-assistance check," he said. "That bumps it up in importance if it's a government check. And you have to wonder about the quality of her legal representation. Maybe she didn't even have a lawyer. " Defense attorney Scoppetta went on arguing his mother's case for several more minutes before offering a personal reaction. "It does seem like a very minor thing, considering what it did to everyone's life. It certainly left us with lots of scars," he said. "On the other hand, the alternative—staying at home for those years—could have been much worse."

THE top floor of 80 Lafayette Street, where Scoppetta and his executive staff work, is a bright, cheerful space, with freshly painted white walls, new furniture that looks as if it came straight out of the Staples catalogue, and a reception area decorated with photographs of children of every ethnicity.

In most other offices in the agency, the walls are the same faded yellow as the ubiquitous manila folders. Instead of photographs, there are posters declaring, for instance, "Crack Kills!" and "I try to take just one day at a time, but lately several days have attacked me at once." Scoppetta said he senses optimism and purpose among the agency's rank-and-file workers. "I just feel it when I walk through the buildings, and caseworkers say hello and we talk, and they say, 'I appreciate what you're doing,' " he said. But he also knows there are many workers who look on him as they looked on previous commissioners—as a glorified temp. "That's been their experience," he said. "Why wouldn't they think that?" He has promised to stay through a Giuliani second term.

Following the death of Daytwon Bennett, he acknowledged that he has barely begun to fix the old system. "One year's time is not going to undo decades of neglect," he said to one reporter after another. And, indeed, Scoppetta's vision will take many years to put into effect even if all goes well. He and Giuliani want to weave a net of public and private agencies to catch signs of danger to children. Scoppetta plans to redeploy his own caseworkers and those from private foster-care agencies by neighborhood, and to have them create a network with neighborhood social-service agencies, schools, police stations, hospitals, shopkeepers, tenant associations, day-care centers—anyone who can detect extreme stress in families and report it before a child's life is jeopardized.

Such a network might well have detected the suffering of Daytwon Bennett. Since his death, numerous neighbors have said they knew that his mother was abusive, but they did not report their concerns. The case also dramatized a need for more so-called preventive services to safeguard children in troubled families and after they return home from foster care—services Scoppetta has acknowledged are given little attention in his reform plan, which focusses more on removing children from harm. Daytwon was ordered returned to his mother last June by a Family Court judge. For years, he and five siblings had been in and out of foster care following repeated episodes of abuse.

The Bennett case exposed many inadequacies. Jocelyn Bennett, age twenty-seven, needed "the most intense, sophisticated psychiatric treatment and counselling," according to Scoppetta, although she was treated only with weekly counselling because more intensive care is rarely available. In sending Bennett's children home from foster care, a Family-Court judge ordered that the family receive ongoing counselling, but it is unclear whether or not the counselling continued, because the caseworker never filed the required report.

Scoppetta said the caseworker, who had been ordered by the court to monitor the family regularly, visited almost twice a month. The caseworker, Scoppetta went on, took special care to examine the children, because Bennett, who was found to have abused them in the past during pregnancies, was pregnant once more, with her seventh child. Daytwon was not at home for a visit on March 20th—he was visiting his father, Jocelyn Bennett said. The caseworker emphasized that she needed to see Daytwon and would return on March 31st. By then he had been dead for two days. "Could she have done more, could she have made more phone calls, should she have come back sooner? I'm sure the caseworker is asking the same thing," Scoppetta said, adding that she was "very much involved with the family." Daytwon's mother has been charged with murder in the second degree. According to her lawyer, she will plead not guilty.

The model for the safety-net approach that Scoppetta envisions in his reform plan is the Center for Family Life, in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, a low-income neighborhood. The center specializes in preventive services, and its director of clinical services for eighteen years, Sister Mary Paul Janchill, functions as a central nervous system for the community. When a child-welfare caseworker recently removed five children from their mother, the local P.T.A. president alerted Sister Mary Paul, and she discovered that the woman had brought her son to the hospital with what she called a dog bite near his genitals, and that the caseworker had deemed it sexual abuse. On the basis of the Sister's promise to monitor the family, a Family Court judge sent the woman's four other children home, and moved the boy to a foster home nearby, where his mother sees him often as the case drags on.

"Government can do this, but it's harder," Sister Mary Paul told me. "You can't parachute the Center for Family Life into a community. It's more than a structure. It's a life that's lived in a community."

This approach—called "neighborhood-based services" in the language of child welfare—is something that "has to be phased in," Scoppetta agreed. "A lot of these ideas, despite our ambitious timetables, are really fairly long-term projects. Even things that seem as though they should be short-term very often take longer than they should."

This was true of one of Scoppetta's first proposals to Mayor Giuliani, in early 1996—a partnership between his agency and the public schools, where principals and teachers see one million one hundred thousand children a day. The idea would so obviously identify many more children at risk that Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew enthusiastically embraced it. But, even with top-level commitment, Crew and Scoppetta didn't sign an official partnership agreement until last month, and the agency still doesn't have the software program it needs to tap into the schools' database on absenteeism.

Central to Scoppetta's vision is a plan to place foster children with families in their own neighborhoods—a departure from the current practice. Scoppetta said that most foster children eventually return home or to relatives, and keeping them in contact could speed reunification of families that can be stabilized. "What a stunning event that has to be for a kid to leave home, and then what do we do? Take him out of everything he knows—out of the schools, out of the neighborhood," said Scoppetta.

While Scoppetta has said that he was "saved" by being placed in an institution far from home, he also believes the experience would have been less disorienting if Woodycrest had been closer to Rivington Street than to Yankee Stadium. But it has become clear that neighborhood foster care is far from a universal solution. In February, Scoppetta was host to a group of experts very different from those he often gathers in his office: these were teen-age foster children with painful pasts, who told him that the child-welfare system had hurt them as much as their parents had.

A twenty-year-old named Wunika Hicks, physically abused by her mother,

"You'll have to excuse my wife. She's a bit of a control freak."

"Here's the artist's conception of your proposed smile."

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who was herself abused, is now in her thirteenth year of foster care, and she listened in disbelief as Scoppetta explained neighborhood foster care. "It depends on what state the family is in!" she exclaimed. "They moved me from Brooklyn to Queens, and my mom followed me to Queens and tried to kidnap me from school. So I'm thinking, Whoa! What kinda people do you think you're dealing with here?"

The Commissioner, in a dress shirt and a striped tie, raised his eyebrows at the expert, in a denim jacket and with a pierced eyebrow, and said, respectfully, "In those cases you wouldn't place children in the same neighborhood."

EVEN if Scoppetta is able to realize all his reforms, his efforts are unfolding against a backdrop of changing social and political forces. Many children's advocates, for example, worry that the still untried federal welfare reforms passed by Congress and signed by President Clinton will increase stress on poor families and, with it, abuse and neglect. Fred Wulczyn, a foster-care demographer at the University of Chicago, who is an authority on the New York system, said, "I try not to be an alarmist, but, given [almost five hundred thousand] children on welfare in New York—with a base that large—it doesn't take much of a shift to have serious consequences."

Scoppetta has said at several public hearings that his agency needs more preventive services and drug-treatment programs, both of which have been cut significantly by Giuliani in response to fiscal crises and the loss of a hundred and thirty-five million dollars in state aid. The drug-treatment cuts are especially punishing, because more than seventy per cent of the children in foster care have a parent who is a substance abuser, Scoppetta said. Yet Scoppetta—whose antennae seem always to remind him that Giuliani is his patron—told me that he is reluctant to press the Mayor to invest in expanded preventive programs, even though they are much cheaper than foster care—when they work. Even if the programs do work, Scoppetta added, it takes years to see the results. "You say you're going to prevent the dysfunctional event? How do you prove it?" On the other hand, it is the goal of the Scoppetta-Giuliani reform plan to identify and treat problems before "the dysfunctional event" occurs. This will be difficult, given the limited base of preventive services.

In all these ways, Scoppetta's plan is like an appealing destination to which no roads have been built. Yet he was able to make some changes quickly, simply by equipping his antiquated agency with modern conveniences. Voice mail is being installed for caseworkers. Hundreds of cellular phones have arrived, so that caseworkers no longer have to search for a functioning pay phone to call supervisors, as is required after each home visit. Cars have been reassigned so that night-duty investigators no longer always have to rely on subways. Next came the computers—four thousand five hundred new I.B.M. P.C.s, financed mostly by the federal and state governments. But in New York's child-welfare agency even a state-of-the-art computer system is hostage to the past. Its database will contain only notes written on and after the day the system is up and running—a condition scheduled for late this month. For detailed histories of ongoing cases, and of old cases—cases like Elisa Izquierdo's—the manila folders have to remain.

In addition to new equipment, Mayor Giuliani has permitted Scoppetta, amid a citywide hiring freeze, to bring in five hundred new caseworkers and to double the number of frontline managers. This was accomplished with money that had been budgeted but not spent when child welfare was a subdivision of the Human Resources Administration, restoring a level of management oversight last seen in the mid-eighties, under Mayor Koch. Scoppetta has imposed tougher educational and training requirements on the new caseworkers and stipulated for the first time that they pass an English test. Instead of immediately being assigned large caseloads, they now spend three months with only three cases at a time.

For all that, some hundred and twenty caseworker jobs remain unfilled, because of continuing turnover. Some veteran caseworkers are left to cover as many as thirty abuse and neglect cases at once, despite a drop in average caseloads from twenty-four to eighteen since Scoppetta's arrival. Scoppetta has begun imposing chain-of-command-style supervision of casework. But there appears to be no progress at the end of the line—Family Court, where judges rule on abuse and neglect petitions and must decide whether to send children home or into foster care. Chief administrative judge Michael Gage, who speaks admiringly of Scoppetta, said, "They still haven't managed to get an appropriate line of supervision so a judge can rely on a caseworker's being in court when he or she is supposed to be with some minimal information about what's going on."

Scoppetta has put a special emphasis on accountability. In September, he dismissed the caseworker who failed to make the required visits to Elisa Izquierdo—the first time in the system's history that a caseworker had been fired for negligence linked to a fatality. The action is now on appeal by the Social Services Employees Union Local 371. In February, Scoppetta called a press conference to issue a report detailing the deaths of six children and the gross abuse of two, who were supposed to be under agency supervision, and this time he announced disciplinary action against twenty-one employees, from caseworkers to a deputy borough director in the Bronx. The report documented the costs of breakdowns in child protection: In one case, Rayvon Evans, at the age of twenty-two months, was allegedly scalded to death by his parents in a bathtub, left dead in full view of his siblings, and tossed out the window into a Dumpster as police entered the apartment. His case had gone unmonitored for two five-month periods as it was transferred among agency workers and divisions. The infant's parents have pleaded not guilty to murder charges.

Scoppetta began the press conference like a prosecutor. "To allow the public to hold the agency accountable is the only way we are going to achieve sustained, meaningful change," he said. Later, asked his personal reaction to reviewing the eight cases, he choked on his words. Then, composing himself, he continued: "I defy anybody to read these case records and read about these kids without coming away feeling as though there's nothing more important to do than protect them." The event received wide media coverage as evidence that Scoppetta was changing the culture of the agency. But it caused some unease for caseworkers faced with the dual burden of large caseloads and increased accountability.

"We can't live with these families. We could have made a visit yesterday and something happens today," Euvonia Jackson, the supervisor in the Brooklyn field office, who is a union representative, said. "I don't excuse negligence, because we do have good and bad apples. But when you don't allow workers the time to do their job, you will have breakdowns." She went on, "I saw the Commissioner when he came here. He said he'd promise to make change. He said it couldn't be all at once, but it's going to be better. So I'm going to believe him. I'm also telling myself, 'Wait and see.' "

One day in January, Scoppetta stopped to give a pep talk at a meeting of managers from his agency's borough offices who were being briefed on the reform plan. His face glowed with confidence, but the audience, after a year of juggling his initiatives, seemed work-weary. He invited questions, but there were none. A few weeks later, though, Scoppetta talked to me about why he is so confident that reform will succeed. He is attempting something important that "simply hasn't happened before," he said. "There's been a lot of lip service paid. And I feel I have this chance to do it. That's something that is very energizing. You have these times when things come together to make something possible that wasn't possible before. It's a remarkable convergence of events—Elisa's death, the city's reaction, the Mayor's reaction, and the fact that I have this opportunity."

So he owes this to history?

"My personal history," he said.

JONATHAN ADAMS is almost six now. In the year since he entered foster care, he has started attending kindergarten, which is now as routine to him as playing with Power Rangers. He has begun to read, recognizing words like "can" and "do" and the phrase "I have." He has lost his first two baby teeth—all reminders that a year is a long time for a child.

At the time when Scoppetta flirted with the idea of adopting Jonathan, more than a hundred other people had the same idea and called the city and Jonathan's foster-care agency. But, although Jonathan's mother may have abandoned him, it is, after all, the first priority of every child-welfare system to reunite children with their parents. A large body of law guards Tamekka Adams's status until "diligent efforts" to achieve her rehabilitation are exhausted and her parental rights are terminated.

Tamekka Adams has no desire to give up Jonathan, but she knows she is unprepared to care for him now, according to her lawyer, Wayne Bodden. "I'd call her a very overwhelmed young girl, kind of like nineteen going on fourteen," said Major Jody Rowland, who interviewed Adams at the Aiken, South Carolina, Sheriff's Department after she was located last summer. According to Bodden and others, Tamekka Adams "flipped out" that day at Toys R Us when she couldn't afford to buy her son even a small toy. She now visits Jonathan once a month, buying bus tickets to New York from South Carolina with help from her family. Although she has taken a parenting class in New York as a requirement of her probation, she has yet to enroll in counselling in South Carolina, a precondition to regaining custody. People who have seen the mother and child together say they are loving and playful, and laugh uproariously, but that Jonathan does not cry when she leaves. When he is asked about her or about the events of March 21, 1996, he stares into space, as if the questioner—and the question—had disappeared.

Tamekka Adams's maternal aunt has asked the Brooklyn Family Court to place Jonathan with her in South Carolina, near Tamekka, who lives with her grandmother in the same town. Officials familiar with the case said federal and state law virtually require the Family Court to comply with such a request from a mother, provided the aunt is deemed qualified. It is not unusual for children to remain until adulthood in such "kinship foster care" arrangements, if parents fail to rehabilitate. As a result, Jonathan may never know the "permanence" the system is supposed to give him. It is telling that the man who runs this system—the nation's largest—cannot steer the course of one foster child.

Scoppetta and Jonathan saw each other again in late February during a photograph session for this article. They walked in Central Park, and Jonathan climbed on Scoppetta's back, draped his arm over the Commissioner's head, and rested his chin on it. They ate lunch in a neighborhood diner and hung out in the Scoppettas' apartment, on Central Park West. Scoppetta turned once to his wife, and asked, only half joking, "Could we reconsider this?"

Later that afternoon, Scoppetta said, "He is so appealing on so many different levels, and it all starts with knowing his story. Since he is so bright, so together, he seems to have gathered strength from his experiences. I can see him growing up into a person with this inherent dignity and self-composure."

Scoppetta seemed to be speaking of a foster child and thinking of himself—not this boy who was threatening to slip through his fingers but the one he did manage to save. ♦

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

A PARTY FOR BROOKE

At ninety-five, Brooke Astor is kicking up her heels—and moving on.

BY BRENDAN GILL

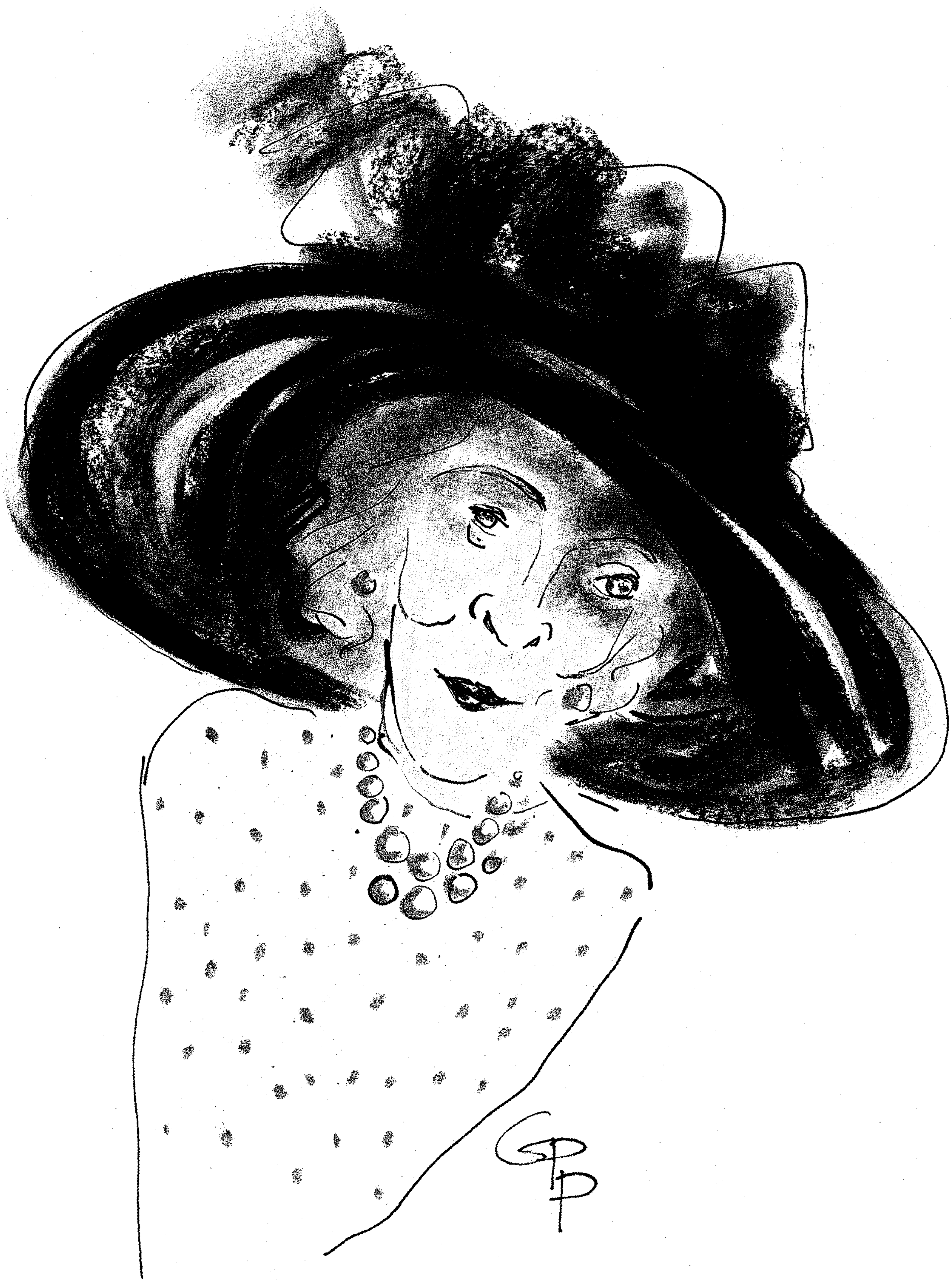
IT is March 17th, and my friend Brooke Astor has invited me to lunch at the Knickerbocker Club, on the corner of Sixty-second Street and Fifth Avenue. In choosing the date, neither of us recalled that it was St. Patrick's Day. The parade—all those bagpipers looking like brightly colored stuffed dolls, all those high-stepping drum majorettes—would be barrelling past the clubhouse, and thousands of people would be lining the curbs on both sides of Fifth Avenue. But no matter. Arriving at the Knick, I am confident that Brooke will have already found her way through the crowds, and so it turns out. She is waiting for me upstairs in the dark-panelled library, nattily dressed in a brown-and-cream tweed suit, with a high-crowned hat to match. Her eyes, which are an unusual shade of green, have a merry sparkle in them. On March 31st, she will be celebrating her ninety-fifth birthday; a party is to be given for her that evening at the Café Carlyle, by half a dozen friends who have elected to remain anonymous. Brooke is full of energy (in our youth, she and I would have called it "pep") as we exchange a kiss and take a table by one of the many-paned library windows overlooking the Avenue. We will have a drink there before we undertake a novel experience: that of jointly standing back and observing not my friend the private Brooke but the public personage who bears her name, that "grande dame" of New York society, which is the last thing she ever intended to be, and which she regards as a media invention.

Hitherto, our lunches have been happy-go-lucky affairs, but today we have an unwritten agenda to deal with. Brooke has announced that the philanthropic activities of the Vincent Astor Foundation, over which she has presided since 1960, will shortly be coming to an end. The trustees will start giving away whatever money remains in the foundation's till—some twenty-five million dollars—thus bringing the amount of money that it has dispensed to a total of a hundred and ninety-five million dollars. As a journalist, I am interested in learning why she and the trustees have decided to put an end to the foundation. Before getting down to business, however, we catch up on the latest news and gossip—gossip not of a particularly hair-raising nature but racy enough to make us feel that we are still actively in the midst of life. I am twelve years younger than Brooke, but this is a gap that has been continuously diminished by the passage of time: over the years, we have become contemporaries. We share a host of friends who have died and whom we welcome back into our lives by naming them. Our minds skip from one apparently unrelated person to another: when we order our drinks—a Campari for Brooke, a gin-and-tonic for me—the word "gin" leads me to quote Eliza Doolittle, in "My Fair Lady," as saying, "Gin was mother's milk to her," to which Brooke responds that she knew Rex Harrison. The trail is a fairly straight one from Eliza Doolittle to Rex Harrison, after which it bends a little, by way of Portofino, where Harrison and Brooke and her second husband, Charles Marshall, spent many happy summers, to Max Beerbohm, whom Brooke often visited in nearby Rapallo; then it goes on to Ezra Pound ("A mean-hearted tennis player," Brooke says, "speaking such disagreeable language") and, finally, by an unexpected detour, to Henry Adams. As a student in Washington, D.C., Brooke met Adams, who gave up his regular afternoon nap to chat with her. I remark on her having known a close descendant of two of our earliest Presidents, both born in the eighteenth century, and Brooke claps her hands with delight at the thought of this formidable leap backward in history. "I do cover a lot of ground, don't I?"

Seated at the window, we are alone in the big, book-lined room; we suspect that most members have considered it prudent to avoid the club on a day when it resembles a besieged fortress. Characteristically, Brooke feels otherwise: the parade is a happy addition to our meeting. She leans into the embrasure of the window and begins to wave to the ranks of shamrock-bedecked men and women marching along the Avenue. Some of the marchers glance up and wave back, evidently grateful to have this trim little stranger urging them on. A young man dressed all in green and carrying four brass kettledrums at waist height makes a low bow to her and bangs his drums with extra zest. "What fun this is!" Brooke says. "We ought to be down there with them. I hope their feet aren't hurting."

The sight of the young people marching puts her in mind of her favorite topic of the moment, which is education. She tells me she is not yet ready to let anyone know the names of the institutions that will be receiving the last of the grants from the foundation, but she says that at least one of them will have something to do with improving the services provided by public-school librarians to schoolchildren throughout the city. She has made the acquaintance of Rudy Crew, the chancellor of the city's Board of Education, and has become one of his outspoken admirers. "He is on the right track, and I am all for him," she says. "I missed a lot by dropping out of school and getting married—married when I ought to have been learning Latin and Greek! My mother took me out of Miss Madeira's school, because she was afraid I would learn too much and become a bluestocking. Well, there was precious little danger of that! I love books, but I love life, too. Sometimes I wonder why, at my age, I like to go out every night, but I do." And then, as we discuss her love of parties, Brooke lets slip another of her financial intentions. "For a long time, I've been a member of the board of the Metropolitan Museum, and every year the

GLADYS PERINT PALMER

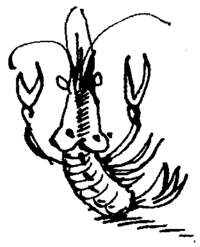


Mrs. Astor: A "grande dame" of New York society is the last thing she ever intended to be.

foundation underwrites a holiday party for the whole staff—over two thousand people! And we are setting aside a million dollars to pay for that party in perpetuity, long after I'm gone."

BROOKE as a dropout? Brooke as a teen-age bride? It is hard to imagine, given the primness of her family background. Her father, John Henry Russell, Jr., was an officer in the Marines; her mother was of Southern stock—a flirtatious social butterfly. Brooke has always said that she liked being an only child. She also liked the fact that, thanks to her father's career, she passed her childhood in such distant places as Hawaii, Panama, Peking, and Santo Domingo. In Washington, the Russells owned a little house on the corner of De Sales and Seventeenth Street, and her mother's parents, George Henry Howard and Roberta Brooke McGill Howard, owned a house on N Street. Brooke had been named after her Grandmother Howard but—fortunately, in her view—was never called Roberta. Her grandfather, who was an attorney, may have been a source of her literary bent: in his spare time, he wrote unsuccessful novels and plays. Brooke, who has published two engaging memoirs—"Patchwork Child" and "Footprints"—as well as two novels, started composing poems and keeping diaries at the age of seven. A diary entry in January, 1913, begins:

> Saturday. Got up at 8. Wrote poems until 11, then skated till 1 o'clock. Gwladys came to tea, began my novel, Beauty Blackwell. Poem enclosed "Bleat, Bleat, Bleat." Skated with Johnny Malone, Rainwater and Shay and Gwladys. She came to tea and we wrote stories.



A few days later:

> Went to Gwladys to tea. Mrs. Williams scolded me. I came home and cried, and burnt my novel. Alas!

Brooke kept diaries faithfully throughout her adolescence. She has crushes on boys, decides that they are all pills, founds a secret society whose members communicate only by signs, begins to draw amusing pen-and-ink caricatures, and, a few days short of her sixteenth birthday, well chaperoned and claiming to be almost eighteen, attends a prom at Princeton. There she meets a recent graduate, John Dryden Kuser, who has bright-blue eyes, dances badly, and talks well: he asserts that he is one of the seven neorealists in the world. Brooke is much impressed. Within a year, the neorealist is to become her first husband. She is seventeen and utterly ignorant of sex. The honeymoon is a disaster, and so are the remaining eight years that she spends with him, living in the New Jersey countryside. The alcoholic son of a very rich family, he is given to physically abusing Brooke and to incessant womanizing. The only fortunate consequence of the marriage is a son, Tony, born when Brooke is twenty-four. Kuser seeks a divorce—he is eventually to marry five times—and Brooke, startled by this turn of events (in her family, divorce was not an option), goes off to Reno. Then, with the help of her financial settlement, she comes to New York and takes an apartment at 1 Gracie Square. She is in her middle twenties and is eager to make a place for herself in Scott Fitzgerald's Jazz Age—ideally, in a literary milieu. She enrolls in courses in short-story writing and playwriting at Columbia University, and, with the help of family connections, she swiftly makes friends with the drama critics John Mason Brown and George Jean Nathan, the playwrights Robert E. Sherwood and Noël Coward, the novelists Joseph Hergesheimer and Glenway Wescott, and the actresses Dorothy and Lillian Gish. Clare Boothe Brokaw, the editor of *Vanity Fair* (she was not yet married to Henry Luce), gets on splendidly with Brooke. (In "Footprints" Brooke writes, "The men who liked her never liked me; and the men I liked quite often did not like her. It worked out very well.") Brooke writes book reviews for *Vogue* and, in 1932, marries a stockbroker named Charles Henry Marshall (always known as Buddie), a Yale classmate and close friend of Cole Porter's. She thrives in the marriage (during which she works as an editor at *House & Garden*); she afterward describes Marshall as the great love of her life. Her son, Tony, seeks to emulate Marshall, and eventually takes his name. Brooke and Buddie have twenty years together before he dies in her arms, of a sudden heart attack, at their country place, in the Berkshires. She is desolated. Her life—her well-nigh perfect life—has apparently come to an end. But not so: to her astonishment, within a year she is married to Vincent Astor, and her career as a public personage begins.

WE have finished our drinks, and we make our way into the dining room, which looks out upon the comparative quiet of Sixty-second Street. The waitresses appear eager to serve us; Brooke has always been admired for her good manners, which are manifested by her showing equal attentiveness to all who cross her path. Once she has ascertained that our waitress and her family are enjoying good health, Brooke orders a sandwich and I order a salad, and I put an inevitable question: What was Vincent Astor really like? Brooke replies, "Vulnerable, cranky, manly," but then she wishes to make me understand how different their backgrounds were, first in respect to her family's "comfortable" economic circumstances and his family's enormous wealth, and second in respect to their upbringings: her childhood was charged with family love, and his was largely empty of it. His father, John Jacob Astor, who went down with the Titanic, in 1912, was too busy building hotels to pay him much heed, and his mother, who later became the fashionable Lady Ribblesdale, appears not to have been much interested in him, either. Brooke, as Marshall's wife, and Vincent, who was married to the former Minnie Cushing, had been casual acquaintances until, at a dinner party designed expressly to lure Brooke out of her bereavement, Vincent fell instantly, importunately in love with her.

Vincent stood six feet four inches tall, and his broad face wore an inscrutable, often sour expression. He trusted only a few people outside the circle into which he had been born. (One such person was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, like him a Hudson River squire; in 1933, to the dismay of many of his fellow-Democrats, F.D.R. enjoyed a postelection celebratory cruise on Vincent's yacht, the Nourmahal—a costly plaything symbolic of those "malefactors of great wealth" whom he had been inveighing against throughout the campaign.) Vincent was in his early sixties and Brooke was in her early fifties when they met. Although at that moment she was certain that she would never marry again, she did remember having been told by a friend that people who have been happily married are the soonest to remarry, and so it befell her. Within a

"Just tell him we're taking him someplace dark where he can see the comet."

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matter of hours, Vincent, with boyish ardor, was storming her by telephone and in letters—sometimes as many as five in a single day. He told her that his wife had been asking for a divorce, which he had been refusing to contemplate, but now . . . if only Brooke would consent to marry him! It was preposterous, it was unthinkable, there were a hundred reasons to keep at a wary distance from him, with his reputation for being truculent and often deliberately rude. Nevertheless, there were the letters, every word of which contradicted the accepted view of him.

They married, and were together for eight years. Vincent had suffered injuries to his lungs during the Second World War, and he smoked constantly, but his doctor assured him that there was no reason for him to stop. He had always disliked parties, so Brooke became for the first and last time in her life a homebody. Vincent was an interesting companion, and they established a routine of seasonal comings and goings—Maine in summer, the old Astor country place on the Hudson in spring and fall, Phoenix during part of the winter, and New York City during the rest of the year. Despite their contentment, Vincent's health failed steadily, and he spent more and more time fussing with his will. Brooke has written that it was almost a game with him—a social occasion on which, surrounded by lawyers and real-estate consultants, he felt in a cheerful mood. In 1948, he had created a foundation; now he looked forward to handing it on to Brooke. They decided that its purpose should be defined in the most universal terms possible—"the alleviation of human misery." Vincent would say to her, "Oh, Pookie, you're going to have such a hell of a lot of fun with the foundation when I am gone," meaning, perhaps, not so much fun as satisfaction.

When Vincent died, in 1959, he left approximately sixty-seven million dollars to Brooke and sixty-seven million dollars to the foundation. To the advisers who had hovered about him over the years, it was cause for alarm and dismay that he had placed so much trust in Brooke's ability. They were especially concerned to learn that she was ready to take an active role as president of the Vincent Astor Foundation. Certain of them had hoped that Brooke would go off on an extended cruise somewhere, in the usual way of rich widows, and leave "serious" matters in their hands. But Vincent had made other plans for her, and she was determined not to fail him. "They had forgotten, if they ever knew, that I had spent most of my life as a working woman," she says. "During all those years with Buddie, I was a magazine editor. I was keeping long hours and making decisions, just like any other executive. I acquired the discipline that everyone has to possess to succeed in New York. I was a woman, but not a fearful one. The first two directors of the foundation were men, and I had a good many differences of opinion with them. Finally, I decided to work with a woman director, Linda Gillies, and she and I have, as you might say, looked out of the same window. Women can be good at that."

Lunch is over, and we make our way down through the deserted building. Brooke is off to the foundation, whose offices consist of a cluster of small rooms at Park Avenue and Fifty-fourth Street; her chauffeur has succeeded in outwitting a maze of police barricades and has backed her car up to the front door of the Knick. In she scrambles, on her way to an afternoon of work.

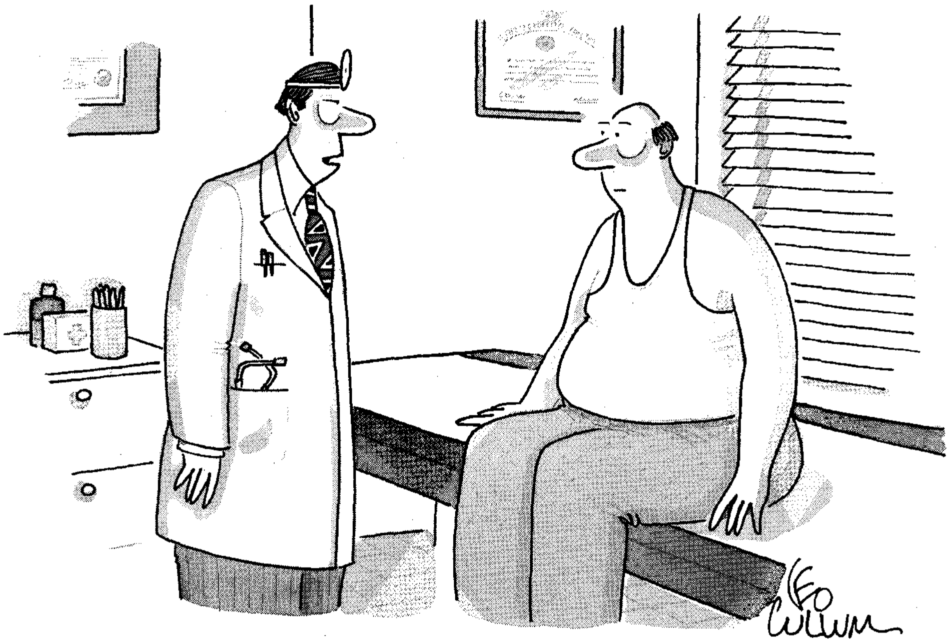
MARCH 24TH. I arrive at Brooke's apartment on the dot of four, the hour that had been appointed for our next meeting. (Brooke and I have an old-fashioned high regard for punctuality.) The apartment, to which she moved after Vincent's death, is high up in one of those handsome red brick Georgian buildings that line Park Avenue in the Seventies. It faces mostly east and south, with high ceilings and sunny terraces ("Ideal for dogs," Brooke says). A maid ushers me into the library—a sea of chintz-covered chairs and sofas, where afternoon sunlight floods in upon vases of flowers, silver-framed photographs, and books, which, in all Brooke's houses, find their way out of the shelves designed to contain them and usurp every available flat surface, including, in neatly stacked ziggurats, the floor. Over the mantel hangs a Childe Hassam "flag" painting—this one painted on the very day in 1917 when our entrance into the First World War was being celebrated. It depicts Fifth Avenue from Thirty-fourth Street northward, and all the buildings being hung with flags and bunting. An exhilarating picture it is, full of high hopes.

Brooke enters, this time dressed in red. The hour is a little early for tea and far too early for cocktails, so we settle for some ginger ale—"mine in a small glass," Brooke tells the maid. The early hour was chosen because later in the afternoon there is to be a meeting of the acquisitions committee of the Metropolitan Museum—an event that Brooke has no intention of missing. Briskly, we return to our discussion of the foundation. From the start, it has acted on the principle that, because most of the Astor fortune was acquired in New York, the foundation's money should be spent within the five boroughs of the city. A second principle is derived from advice given to Brooke by her friend John D. Rockefeller III, who told her, "The person who has control of the money should also be personally involved in the giving. It is a lot of work, but it is worth it." Brooke and Linda Gillies are constantly out and about, taking in with alert eyes and ears the essence of a proposed project, since it may or may not resemble the description that was offered in its application for a grant. "In recent years, composing applications for grants has become an accepted literary form," Brooke says. "Sometimes they are fact and sometimes fiction."

The foundation in its early days concerned itself with youth services and public housing. It contributed a large sum to the development of Bedford-Stuyvesant, and in respect to other housing projects it sought to solve the problem of their inhumanly large scale and bleak surroundings by providing them with well-designed parks and playgrounds. As the years passed, Brooke became more and more interested in historic preservation—a field beset by crises. Typical of her spirited response to such crises was her improvised rescue of a number of rare Federal-style houses in lower Manhattan, adjacent to Fraunces Tavern and Coenties Slip. In the late seventies, the houses were about to be bulldozed out of existence and a parking lot put in their place. A newly organized not-for-profit preservation group called the New York Landmarks Conservancy (of which I was one of the founders) had been negotiating in vain to buy the property; not only was the price beyond its means but an executive of the company that owned the site had become obsessed with tearing down the ancient buildings as symbolic of a New York City past that he despised.

One day the conservancy heard a rumor to the effect that the obsessed executive was plotting to demolish the houses over the coming weekend. Brooke had already visited the site and had indicated that the conservancy could expect assistance from the foundation when her board of trustees met in a few months' time. When the emergency arose, the conservancy telephoned Brooke in the country and asked if the Astor Foundation would provide sufficient money for the down payment. She replied that she thought the foundation would be willing, whereupon the conservancy made haste to sign a contract for the property, forestalling the bulldozer by a matter of hours.

Through a similar timely intervention, Brooke helped to save the north wing of the Villard Houses, on Madison Avenue just behind St. Patrick's Cathedral. The wing was then a near-ruin and is now the accurately restored headquarters of the Municipal Art Society, with an architectural bookshop and several good-sized exhibition galleries. (It was in the south wing of the Villard Houses, once owned by Mrs. Whitelaw Reid—and now occupied by a new version of Le Cirque, presided over by Brooke's friend Sirio Maccioni—that Brooke attended her first New York City party, in the nineteen-twenties.) All told, the foundation has provided grants to almost three thousand causes, the largest single grant being ten million to the New York Public Library, and one of the smaller being a grant to the Animal Medical Center to provide free care for pets of indigent old people. ("Old people tend to have old pets," Brooke says. "They need help.") She states candidly that what she calls the crown jewels of New York City—the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Public Library, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Wildlife Conservation Society (formerly known as the New York Zoological Society), and Rockefeller University—will receive the bulk of her personal fortune. The twenty-five million dollars remaining in the foundation will go to some fifty organizations that the foundation has looked upon with favor in the past. "No doubt there will be some unlooked-for exceptions, especially in the field of education," Brooke adds, jumping to her feet: it's time to set off for the Met. "I am



"Your skin is enlarged."

always surprising myself at the last moment and I am not afraid of surprises."

MARCH 31ST. The invitation to the party stipulated eight o'clock and black tie, and I approach the Café Carlyle at precisely eight, wearing a purple bow tie that serves as my version of black. It began snowing earlier in the day, and now the wind is rising. On Madison Avenue, umbrellas are blowing inside out, and the snow, as it strikes the warm sidewalk, turns into slush. I had expected the party to start late because of the storm, but no. Although many of Brooke's friends are elderly, they have long since demonstrated their physical toughness; they are survivors, who believe (as Zelda Fitzgerald once wrote) that weather is for children. In they come, shaking the snow off their hats and coats, stamping their boots on the marble floor of the vestibule. Cocktails are being served in the oval interior space of the hotel, which is known as the Gallery. Within a few minutes, the space is as jam-packed as a subway car at rush hour, and evidently that is just the way everyone wishes it to be. There is much laughter amid exclamations of delight at recognizing old friends, and this is odd, because most of the guests encounter one another at parties at least once or twice a week and have been doing so for decades. Nevertheless, their delight appears to be authentic, and all the more intense because of the person whose birthday they are celebrating.

"Where's Brooke?" The recurrent question is answered with a gesture, indicating the point at which she was last seen. As usual, Brooke is making an effort to be everywhere at once, and, because she is small, she is nearly invisible as she threads her way through the crowd. She is wearing a long evening gown of dark-green velvet—"A fine dress to dance in; I can kick up my heels"—and around her throat is a necklace of large emeralds in a platinum setting. I am familiar with its history, which Brooke recounted in "Footprints," describing an incident that took place after Vincent's death:

> Mr. Bulgari, the Italian jeweler, sent over a colored transparency of the emerald necklace and earrings for which we had selected the stones in London in 1958. With the transparency there was an impatient note from Vincent asking how soon it was to be finished as he wanted it for my birthday. Now here it was, two years later. I certainly did not feel in the mood to buy such an expensive present, but I went to see my banker, who said, "Vincent ordered it for you and wanted you to have it. If you like it yourself, I think you should buy it." I *did* like it. Vincent loved jewelry and had very good taste. It is pretty and not ostentatious but very elegant, and so I bought it. Considering that it was really Vincent's last personal gift to me, I am very sentimental about it.

"I don't wear it very often," Brooke says now, tapping the necklace, "but it *was* to be a birthday present and this *is* my birthday and I think Vincent would be very pleased."

I suggest that the necklace gives her something of the appearance of a grande dame—the thing that she vehemently claims not to be. "Oh, fiddlesticks!" Brooke says. "In the first place, it requires society with a capital 's' to provide an arena for grandes dames to perform in, and such a society doesn't exist anymore—at least, not here in New York. In the second place, I would never try to compete in such an arena. It's the way I have run the foundation, personally checking up on everything we do, that has made me a public figure, but it certainly hasn't made me a grande dame."

Over the babble of voices, I ask my final question: "Once upon a time, you wrote that you would never give up the foundation. What has led you to change your mind?"

"Something so simple," Brooke replies. "I'm determined to make a tidy ending—to leave everything just as I wish it to be, in my kind of apple-pie order. Sometimes I pretend to fear that in helping to save so many monuments I have myself become a sort of monument, but I am not immobile—I am still on the march. 'Don't die guessing,' my mother said, and I have hearkened to her words. Wonderful as the foundation has been as an experience, it has necessarily tied me down, kept me within bounds. Even now, I have so many local sites that remain to be visited. Next week, I will be going up to the Bronx to inspect the renovation work being carried out on an old hospital there; I will also be cutting a ribbon in Harlem soon, to celebrate the restoration of a row of houses built on land owned by Vincent's great-grandfather. These houses are a model for the reclamation of the whole of Harlem, which has the finest stock of buildings in the city and deserves to be reborn. But I am at a very advanced age, and there are still so many places in the world that I haven't seen, so much that I haven't done! Imagine—I've never been to Russia, I've never seen St. Petersburg!"

A wave of newly arrived friends encircles Brooke and, at the urging of the Carlyle staff, bears her away to the Café, where tables have been set up all around a small dance floor. This is the room in which the singer Bobby Short regularly performs, and, sure enough, Short is on hand to make Brooke welcome. Once everyone has been seated, the dinner begins—caviar, chicken hash, red and white wine, champagne—and it is followed by speeches, which are wisely brief and genuinely affectionate. Annette de la Renta conveys a salute from William Astor, of the English branch of the family, who has been unexpectedly grounded in Florida by the storm. She is followed by David Rockefeller, Elizabeth Rohatyn, Barbara Walters, Brian Bedford, and Tony Marshall, who, as Brooke's son, speaks touchingly of the happiness that he and his mother have shared for more than seventy years.

Brooke rises to respond. She always speaks at ease, without preparation, phrases springing to her lips with the unguardedness of someone who has long known exactly who she is. This evening, she offers the merest handful of words, but in their brevity they have a ring of the gnomic. She says, "I know that you are here because you like me, and I know that I am here because I like you. All of you are always in my heart." Bobby Short seats himself at the piano, saying, "Whenever Brooke comes here to the Café, I play a certain favorite song of hers." He launches bouncily into Cole Porter's "Just One of Those Things." I think of Cole and Linda Porter and Brooke and Buddie Marshall dining in Paris, in the Porters' suave house on the Rue Monsieur, a long time ago.

As Short segues into "Happy Birthday to You," everyone stands and awaits the arrival of the birthday cake. For a few moments (all birthday parties have this crisis in common), no cake is forthcoming, and Short urges upon us a second round of "Happy Birthday." At last the cake, ablaze with candles, is wheeled out onto the edge of the dance floor. Brooke readily blows out the candles. Tradition holds that, whatever her wish may have been, it is sure to be granted. The hour is late. Beyond the windows, snow is falling and is expected to continue falling throughout the night. Here in the Café, everything is safe against the storm. And Brooke is dancing. ◆

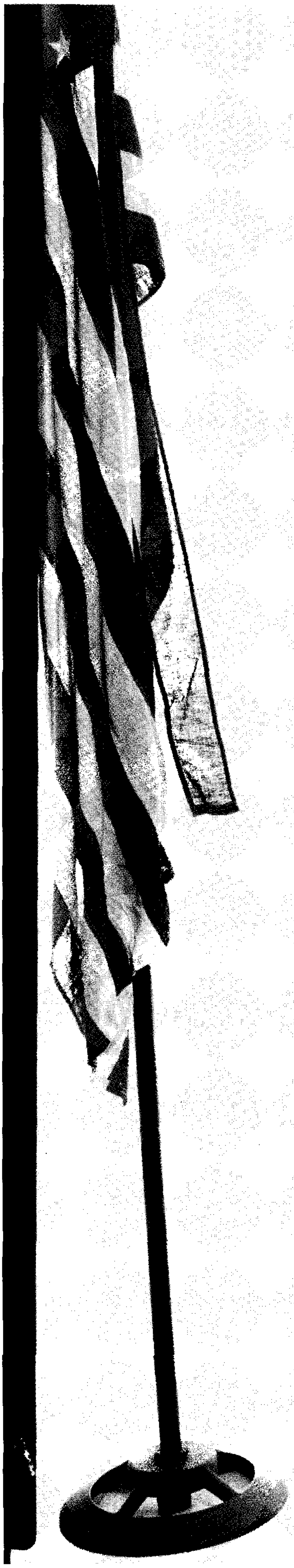
POSTSCRIPT

KADDISH

STRANGE now to think of him, gone in a tsunami of obituaries (including the priceless scolding contribution of George F. Will!); gone, with his ashes to be sprinkled at Buddhist institutes and on the Newark grave of his father, Louis; gone to join his paranoiac, tragic mother, Naomi ("gone without corsets & eyes"); gone to join his highway friends Cassady and Kerouac; gone to join his masters, Blake and Smart, Whitman and Williams—gone, this country's bard of the "bop kaballa," its Paterson Hebrew and Lower East Side Buddhist, tireless teacher & liberator & comedian ("I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys"), entranced true artist and always winking bullshit artist & media jester.

Allen Ginsberg is gone, and it is strange. The art part of Ginsberg is not hard to identify: several of the poems in "Howl" and his masterpiece, "Kaddish," and a few later poems will very likely be read not only as anthology examples of rawness in the great (and long over) debate between the raw and the cooked in American poetry but also for themselves, for their ecstasy and strangeness and, not least, control, for the flat-out daring of the verbal combinations as he explores the ephemera of society and the body and the hoped-for persistence of spirit and idea: "No hyacinthine imagination can express this clock of meat bleakly pining for / its sweet immaterial paradise which I have celebrated in one gone / dithyramb after another." The distinguishing feature of Ginsberg's character was his generosity, his sweetness, his openness. He allowed nearly everything into his canon—Aboriginal song, St. John of the Cross, Bob Dylan (Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" was Ginsberg's favorite poem of all)—and in the end he had not only preached the pleasures of that canon; he had joined it.

—DAVID REMNICK



PHOTOGRAPH
BY RICHARD AVEDON

Allen Ginsberg with his father, Louis, 1970.

DEATH & FAME

BY ALLEN GINSBERG

1926-1997

When I die
I don't care what happens to my body
throw ashes in the air, scatter 'em in East River
bury an urn in Elizabeth New Jersey, B'nai Israel Cemetery
But I want a big funeral
St. Patrick's Cathedral, St. Mark's Church, the largest synagogue in Manhattan
First, there's family, brother, nephews, spry aged Edith stepmother 96, Aunt
    Honey from old Newark,
Doctor Joel, cousin Mindy, brother Gene one eyed one ear'd, sister-in-law
    blonde Connie, five nephews, stepbrothers & sisters their grandchildren,
companion Peter Orlovsky, caretakers Rosenthal & Hale, Bill Morgan—
Next, teacher Trungpa Vajracharya's ghost mind, Gelek Rinpoche there, Sakyong
    Mipham, Dalai Lama alert, chance visiting America, Satchitananda Swami
Shivananda, Dehorahava Baba, Karmapa XVI, Dudjom Rinpoche, Katagiri &
    Suzuki Roshi's phantoms
Baker, Whalen, Daido Loori, Qwong, frail white-haired Kapleau Roshis,
    Lama Tarchin—
Then, most important, lovers over half century
Dozens, a hundred, more, older fellows bald & rich
young boys met naked recently in bed, crowds surprised to see each other,
    innumerable, intimate, exchanging memories
"He taught me to meditate, now I'm an old veteran of the thousand day
    retreat—"
"I played music on subway platforms, I'm straight but loved him he loved me"
"I felt more love from him at 19 than ever from anyone"
"We'd lie under covers, gossip, read my poetry, hug & kiss belly to belly arms
    round each other"
"I'd always get into his bed with underwear on & by morning my skivvies would
    be on the floor"
"Japanese, always wanted take it up my bum with a master"
"We'd talk all night about Kerouac & Cassady sit Buddhalike then sleep in his
    captain's bed"
"He seemed to need so much affection, a shame not to make him happy"
"I was lonely never in bed nude with anyone before, he was so gentle my
    stomach
shuddered when he traced his finger along my abdomen nipple to hips—"
"All I did was lay back eyes closed, he'd bring me to come with mouth & fingers
    along my waist"
"He gave great head"
So there be gossip from loves of 1946, ghost of Neal Cassady commingling with
    flesh and youthful blood of 1997

and surprise—"You too? But I thought you were straight!"
"I am but Ginsberg an exception, for some reason he pleased me,"
"I forgot whether I was straight gay queer or funny, was myself, tender and
affectionate to be kissed on the top of my head,
my forehead throat heart & solar plexus, mid-belly, on my prick, tickled with his
tongue my behind"
"I loved the way he'd recite 'But at my back I always hear / Time's winged chariot
hurrying near,' heads together, eye to eye, on a pillow—"
Among lovers one handsome youth straggling the rear
"I studied his poetry class, 17-year-old kid, ran some errands to his walkup
flat,
seduced me didn't want to, made me come, went home, never saw him again
never wanted to . . ."
"He couldn't get it up but loved me," "A clean old man," "He made sure I came
first"
This the crowd most surprised proud at ceremonial place of honor—
Then poets & musicians—college boys' grunge bands—age-old rock star Beatles,
faithful guitar accompanists, gay classical conductors, unknown high Jazz
music composers, funky trumpeters, bowed bass & french horn black
geniuses, folksingers fiddlers with dobro tambourine harmonica mandolin
autoharp pennywhistles & kazoos
Next, artist Italian romantic realists schooled in mystic 60's India, late fauve
Tuscan painter-poets, Classicdraftsman Massachusetts surreal jackanapes
with continental wives, poverty sketchbook gesso oil watercolor masters
from American provinces
Then high-school teachers, lonely Irish librarians, delicate bibliophiles, sex
liberation troops nay armies, ladies of either sex
"I met him dozens of times he never remembered my name I loved him anyway,
true artist"
"Nervous breakdown after menopause, his poetry humor saved me from suicide
hospitals"
"*Charmant*, genius with modest manners, washed sink dishes, my studio guest a
week in Budapest"
Thousands of readers, " 'Howl' changed my life in Libertyville Illinois"
"I saw him read Montclair State Teachers College decided be a poet—"
"He turned me on, I started with garage rock sang my songs in Kansas City"
" 'Kaddish' made me weep for myself & father alive in Nevada City"
" 'Father Death' comforted me when my sister died Boston 1982"
"I read what he said in a newsmagazine, blew my mind, realized others like me
out there"
Deaf & Dumb bards with hand signing quick brilliant gestures
Then journalists, editors' secretaries, agents, portraitists & photography
aficionados, rock critics, cultured laborers, cultural historians come to
witness the historic funeral
Super-fans, poetasters, aging Beatniks & Deadheads, autograph-hunters,
distinguished paparazzi, intelligent gawkers
Everyone knew they were part of "History" except the deceased
who never knew exactly what was happening even when I was alive

(*February 22, 1997*)

FICTION

HEIST

Who would rob a church?

BY E. L. DOCTOROW

FILIP PAGOWSKI

SUNDAY afternoon. A peddler in a purple chorister's robe selling watches in Battery Park. Fellow with dreadlocks, a sweet smile, sacral presence. Doing well.

Rock doves everywhere aswoop, the grit of the city in their wings. And the glare of the oil-slicked bay, and a warm-throated autumn breeze like a woman blowing in my ears.

At my back, the financial skyline of lower Manhattan sunlit into an islanded cathedral, a religioplex.

And here's the ferry from Ellis Island. Listing to starboard, her three decks jammed to the rails. Sideswipes bulkhead for contemptuous New York landing. Oof. Pilings groan, crack like gunfire. Man on the promenade breaks into a run. How can I be lonely in this city?

Tourists stampeding down the gangplank. Cameras, camcorders, and stupefied children slung from their shoulders. Sun hats and baseball caps insouciant this morning, now their serious, unfortunate fashion.

Lord, there is something so exhausted about the New York waterfront, as if the smell of the sea were oil, as if boats were buses, as if all Heaven were a garage hung with girlie calendars, the months to come already leafed and fingered in black grease.

But I went back to the peddler in the choir robe and said I liked the look. Told him I'd give him a dollar if he'd let me see the label. The smile dissolves.

You crazy, mon?

I was in my mufti grunge—jeans, leather jacket over plaid shirt over T-shirt. Not even cruciform I.D. to flash at him.

Lifts his tray of watches out of reach: Get away, you got no business wit me. Looking left and right as he says it.

And then later on my walk, at Astor Place, where they lay their goods on plastic shower curtains on the sidewalk: three of the sacristy's purple choir robes neatly folded and stacked between a "Best of the Highwaymen" LP and the autobiography of George Sanders. I picked one and turned back the neck, and there was the label, Churchpew Crafts, and the laundry mark from Mr. Chung. The peddler, a solemn young mestizo with that bowl of black hair they have, wanted ten dollars each. I thought that was reasonable.

They come over from Senegal, or up from the Caribbean, or from Lima, San Salvador, Oaxaca, and find a piece of sidewalk and go to work. The world's poor lapping our shores, like the rising of the global-warmed sea. I remember how, on the way to Machu Picchu, I stopped in the town of Cuzco and watched the dances and listened to the street bands. I was told when I found my camera missing that I could buy it back the next morning in the market street behind the cathedral. Sure enough, next morning there were the women of Cuzco, in their woven ponchos of red and ochre, braids depending from their black derbies, broad Olmec heads smiling shyly. They were fencing the stuff. Merciful heavens, I was pissed. But, surrounded by Anglos ransacking the stalls as if searching for their lost dead, how, my Lord Jesus, could I not accept the justice of the situation?

As I did at Astor Place in the shadow of the great, mansarded, brownstone-voluminous Cooper Union people's college with the birds flying up from the square.

A block east, on St. Mark's, a thrift shop had the altar candlesticks that were heisted along with the robes. Twenty-five dollars the pair. While I was at it, I bought half a dozen used paperback detective novels. To learn the trade.

I'm lying, Lord, I just read the damn things when I'm depressed. The paperback detective never fails me. His rod and his gaff, they comfort me. Sure, a life is lost here and there, but the paperback's world is ordered, circumscribed, dependable in its punishments. More than I can say for Yours.

I know You are on this screen with me. If Thos. Pemberton, D.D., is losing his life, he's losing it here, to his watchful God. Not just over my shoulder do I presumptively locate You, or in the Anglican starch of my collar, or in the rectory walls, or in the coolness of the chapel stone that frames the door, but in the blinking cursor . . .

TUESDAY eve. Up to Lenox Hill to see my terminal: ambulances backing into the emergency bay with their beepings and blinding strobe lights. They used to have "Quiet" signs around hospitals. Doctors' cars double-parked, patients strapped on gurneys double-parked on the sidewalk, smart young Upper East Side workforce pouring out of the subway walking past not looking. Looking.

It gets dark earlier now. Lights coming on in the apartment buildings. If only I was rising to a smart one-bedroom. A lithe young woman home from her interesting job, listening for my ring. Uncorking the wine, humming, wearing no underwear.

In the lobby, a stoic crowd primed for visiting hours with bags and bundles and infants squirming in laps. And that profession of the plague of our time, the security guard, in various indolent versions.

My terminal's room door slapped with a "Restricted Area" warning. I push in, all smiles.

You got medicine, Father? You gonna make me well? Then get the fuck outta here. The fuck out, I don't need your bullshit.

Enormous eyes all that's left of him. An arm bone aims the remote like a gun, and there in the hanging set the smiling girl spins the big wheel.

My comforting pastoral visit concluded, I pass down the hall, where several neatly dressed black people wait outside a private room. They hold gifts in their arms. I smell non-hospital things. A whiff of fruit pie still hot from the oven.

Soups. Simmering roasts. I stand on tiptoe. Who is that? Through the flowers, like a Gauguin, a handsome, light-complected black woman sitting up in bed. Turbaned. Regal. I don't hear the words, but her melodious, deep voice of prayer knows whereof it speaks. The men with their hats in their hands and their heads bowed. The women with white kerchiefs. On the way out I inquire of the floor nurse.

S.R.O. twice a day, she says. We get all of Zion up here. The only good thing, since Sister checked in I don't have to shop for supper. Yesterday I brought home baked pork chops. You wouldn't believe how good they were.

ANOTHER one having trouble with my bullshit—the widow codename Moira. In her new duplex that looks across the river to the Pepsi-Cola sign she's been reading Pagels on early Christianity.

It was all politics, wasn't it? she asks me.

Yes, I sez to her.

And so whoever won, that's why we have what we have now?

Well, with a nod at the Reformation, I suppose, yes.

She lies back on the pillows. So it's all made up, it's an invention?

Yes, I sez, taking her in my arms. And you know for the longest time it actually worked.

Used to try to make her laugh at the dances at Spence. Couldn't then, can't now. A gifted melancholic, Moira. The lost husband an add-on.

But she was one of the few in the old crowd who didn't think I was throwing my life away.

Wavy thick brown hair parted in the middle. Glimmering dark eyes, set a bit too wide. Figure not current, lacking tone, Glory to God in the highest.

From the corner of her full-lipped mouth her tongue emerges and licks away a teardrop.

And then, Jesus, the surprising condolence of her wet salted kiss.

FOR the sermon:

Open with that scene in the hospital, those good and righteous folk praying at the bedside of their minister. The humility of those people, their faith glowing like light around them, put me in such longing . . . to share their innocence.

But then I asked myself: Why must faith rely on innocence? Must it be blind? Why must it come of people's *need* to believe?

We are all of us so pitiful in our desire to be unburdened, we will embrace Christianity's rule or any other claim of God's authority for that matter. God's authority, is a powerful claim and reduces us all, wherever we are in the world, whatever our tradition, to beggarly gratitude.

So where is the truth to be found? Who are the elect blessedly walking the true path to Salvation . . . and who are the misguided others? Can we tell? Do we know? We think we know—of course we think we know. We have our belief. But how do we distinguish our truth from another's falsity, we of the true faith, except by the story we cherish? Our story of God. But, my friends, I ask you: Is God a story? Can we, each of us examining our faith—I mean its pure center, not its comforts, not its habits, not its ritual sacraments—can we believe anymore in the heart of our faith that God is our story of Him? What, for instance, has the industrialized carnage, the continentally engineered terrorist slaughter of the Holocaust done to our story? Do we dare ask? What mortification, what ritual, what practice would have been a commensurate Christian response to the Holocaust? Something to assure us of the truth of our story? Something as earthshaking in its way as Auschwitz and Dachau—a mass exile, perhaps? A lifelong commitment of millions of Christians to wandering, derelict, over the world? A clearing out of the lands and cities a thousand miles in every direction from each and every death camp? I don't know what it would be—but I know I'd recognize it if I saw it. If we go on with our story, blindly, after something like that, is it not merely innocent but also foolish, and possibly a defamation, a profound impiety? To presume to contain God in this unknowing story of ours, to hold Him, circumscribe Him, the author of everything we can conceive and everything we cannot conceive . . . in *our* story of *Him*? *Of Her*? *Of whom*? What in the name of our faith—what in God's name!—do we think we are talking about!

WEDNESDAY lunch.

Well, Father, I hear you delivered yourself of another doozy.

How do you get your information, Charley. My little deacon, maybe, or my Kapellmeister?

Be serious.

No, really, unless you've got the altar bugged. Because, God knows, there's nobody but us chickens. Give me an uptown parish, why don't you, where the subway doesn't shake the rafters. Give me one of God's midtown showplaces of the pious rich and famous, and I'll show you what doozy means.

Now, listen, Pem, he says. This is unseemly. You are doing and saying things that are . . . ecclesiastically worrying.

He frowns at his grilled fish as if wondering what it's doing there. His well-chosen Pinot Grigio shamelessly neglected as he sips ice water.

Tell me what I should be talking about, Charley. My five parishioners are serious people. I mean, is this only a problem for Jewish theology? Mormon? Swedenborgian?

There's a place for doubt. And it's not the altar of St. Timothy's.

Funny you should say that. Doubt is my next week's sermon: the idea is that in our time it is no more likely that a religious person will live a moral life than that an irreligious person will. What do you think?

A tone has crept in, a pride of intellect, something is not right—

And it may be that we guardians of the sacred texts are in spirit less God-fearing than the average secular individual in a modern industrial democracy who has quietly accepted the ethical teachings and installed them in himself and or herself.

Lays the knife and fork down, composes his thoughts: You've always been your own man, Pem, and in the past I've had a sneaking admiration for the freedom you've found within church discipline. We all have. And in a sense you've paid for it, we both know that. In terms of talent and brains, the way you burned up Yale, you probably should have been my bishop. But in another sense it is harder to do what I do, be the authority that your kind is always testing.

My kind?

Please think about this. The file is getting awfully thick. You are headed for an examination, a Presentment. Is that what you want?

His blue eyes look disarmingly into mine. Boyish shock of hair, now gray, falling over the forehead. Then his famous smile flashes over his face and instantly fades, having been the grimace of distraction of an administrative mind.

What I know of such things, Pem, I know well. Self-destruction is not one act, or even one kind of act. It is the whole man coming apart in every direction, all three hundred and sixty degrees.

Amen to that, Charley. You don't suppose there's time for a double espresso?

ALL right, that wise old dog Tillich—Paulus Tillichus—how does he construe the sermon? Picks a text and worries the hell out of it. Sniffs at the words, paws them: what, when you get right down to it, is a *demon*? You say you want to be *saved*? But what does that mean? When you pray for *eternal life*, what do you think you're asking for? Paulus, God's philologist, this Merriam-Webster of the D.D.s, this German . . . shepherd. I loved him. The suspense he held us in—teetering on the edge of secularism, arms waving wildly. Of course, he saved us every time, pulled back from the abyss, and we were O.K. after all, back with Jesus. Until the next sermon, the next lesson. Because if God is to live, the words of faith must be renewed. The words must be reborn.

Oh, did we flock to him. Enrollments soared.

But that was then and this is now.

We're back in Christendom, Paulus. People are born again, not words. You can see it on television.

FRIDAY morning. Following his intuition, Divinity Detective wandered over to the restaurant-supply district on the Bowery, below Houston, where the trade is brisk in used steam tables, walk-in freezers, grills, sinks, pots, woks, and bins of cutlery. Back behind the Taipei Trading Company was the antique gas-operated fridge too recently acquired to have a sales tag, with the mark of my shoe sole still on the door where I kicked it when it wouldn't stay closed. And in one of the bins of the used-dish department the tea things from our pantry, white with a green trim, gift from the dear departed Ladies' Auxiliary.

Practically named my own price, Lord. With free delivery. A steal.

EVENING. I walk over to Tompkins Square, find my friend on his bench.

This has got to stop, I say to him.

My, you riled up.

Wouldn't you be?

Not like the Pops I know.

I thought we had an understanding. I thought there was mutual respect.

They is. Have a seat.

Sparrows working the benches in the dusk.

Told you wastin' your time, but I ast aroun like I said I would. No one here hittin' on Tim's.

Not from here?

Thasit.

How can you be sure?

This regulated territory.

Regulated! That's funny.

Now who's not showin' respeck. This my parish we talkin' bout. Church of the Sweet Vision. They lean on me, see what I'm sayin'? I am known for my compassion. You dealin' with foreigners or some such, thas my word to you.

Ah, hell. I suppose you're right.

No problem. Unsnaps attaché case: Here, my very own personal blend. No charge. Relax yoursel.

Thanks.

Toke of my affection.

MONDAY night, a new tack. I waited in the balcony with my BearScare six-volt Superbeam. If something stirred, I'd just press the button and my Superbeam would hit the altar at a hundred and eighty-six thousand miles per second—same cruising speed as the finger of God.

The amber crime-preventing lights on the block make a perfect indoor crime site of my church. Intimations of a kind of tarnished air in the vaulted spaces. The stained-glass figures yellowed into lurid obsolescence. How many years has this church been home to me? But all I had to do was sit up in the back for a few hours to understand the truth of its stolid indifference. How an oak pew creaks. How a passing police siren in its two Doppler pitches is like a crisis being filed away in the stone walls.

And then, Lord, I confess, I dozed. Father Brown would never have done that. But there was this crash, as if a waiter had dropped a whole load of dishes. That brought me up smartly. Wait a minute, I thought, churches don't have waiters—they're hitting the pantry again! I had figured them for the altar. I raced my bulk down the stairs, my Superbeam held aloft like a club. "Cry God for Tommy, England, and St. Tim!" How long had I been asleep? I stood in the doorway, found the light switch, and, when you do that, for an instant the only working sense is the sense of smell: hashish in that empty pantry. Male body odor. But also the pungent sanguinary scent of female hormone. And something else, something else. Like lipstick, or lollipop.

The dish cabinets—some of the panes shattered, broken cups and saucers on the floor, a cup still rocking.

A whiff of cool air. They'd gone out the alley door. An ungainly something moving out there. A deep metallic *bong* sounds up through my heels. Someone curses. It is me, fumbling with the damn searchlight. I swing the beam out and see a shadow rising with distinction, something with right angles in the vanished instant of the turned corner.

I ran back into the church and let my little light shine. Behind the altar where the big brass cross should have been was a shadow of your crucifix, Lord, in the unfaded paint of my predecessor's poor taste.

WHAT the real detective said: Take my word for it, padre. I been in this precinct ten years. They'll hit a synagogue for the whatchamacallit, the Torah. Because it's handwritten, not a mass-produced item. It'll bring, a minimum, five K. Whereas the book value for your cross has got to be zilch. Nada. No disrespect, we're practically related, I'm Catholic, go to Mass, but on the street there is no way it is anything but scrap metal. Jesus! Whata buncha sickos.

MISTAKE talking to the *Times*. Such a sympathetic young man. I didn't understand anything till they took the cross, I told him. I thought they were just crackheads looking for a few dollars. Maybe they didn't understand it themselves. Am I angry? No. I'm used to this, I am used to being robbed. When the diocese took away my food-for-the-homeless program and merged it with one across town, I lost most of my parishioners. That was a big-time heist. So even before this happened I was tapped out. These people, whoever they are, have lifted our cross. It bothered me at first. But on further reflection maybe Christ goes where He is needed.

Phone ringing off the hook. I'm getting my very own Presentment. But also pledges of support, checks rolling in. Including some of the old crowd, pals now of my dear wife, who had thought my vocabulary quaint, like a performance of Mozart on period instruments. Tommy

Pemberton will scrape a few pieties for us on his viola da gamba. I count nine hundred and change here. Have I stumbled on a new scam? I tell you, Lord, these people just don't get it. What am I supposed to do, put up a fence? Electrify it?

The TV newspeople swarming all over. Banging on my door. Mayday, Mayday! I will raise the sash behind this desk, drop nimbly to the rubbled lot, pass under the window of Ecstatic Reps, where the lady with the big hocks is doing the treadmill, and I'm gone. Thanks heaps, Metro section.

TRISH giving a dinner when I got here. The caterer's man who let me in thought I was a latecomer. Now that I think about it, I was looking straight ahead as I passed the dining room, a millisecond, right? Yet I saw everything: which silver, the floral centerpiece. She's doing the veal-paillard dinner. Château Latour in the Steuben decanters. Oh, what a waste. Two of the hopefuls present, the French U.N. diplomat, the boy-genius mutual-fund manager. Odds on the Frenchman. The others all extras. Amazing the noise ten people can make around a table. And, in this same millisecond of candlelight, Trish's glance over the rim of the wineglass raised to her lips, those cheekbones, the blue amused eyes, the frosted coif. That fraction of an instant of my passage in the doorway was all she needed from the far end of the table to see what she had to see of me, to understand, to know why I'd slunk home. But isn't it terrible that after it's over between us the synapses continue firing coördinately? What do You have to say about that, Lord? All the problems we have with You, we haven't even gotten around to your small-time perversities. I mean when an instant is still the capacious, hoppingly alive carrier of all our intelligence. And it's the same damn dumb biology when, however moved I am by another woman, the tips of my fingers are recording that she isn't Trish.

But the dining room was the least of it. It's a long walk down the hall to the guest room when the girls are home for the weekend.

We are on battery pack, Lord, I forgot the A.C. gizmo. And I am exhausted—forgive me.

OFF the scanner:

dear father if u want to now where yor cross luk in 7531 w 168 street apt 2A where the santeria oombalah father casts the sea shels an scarifises chickns.

Sure.

Dear Mr. Pemberton, We are two missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) assigned to the Lower Eastside of New York . . .

Nuffuvthat.

Dear Father, We have read of your troubles with those aliens who presume to desecrate the Christian church and smirch the Living God. Lest you despair, I am one of a group in nearby New Jersey who have dedicated ourselves to defending the Republic and the Sacred name of Jesus from interlopers wherever they may arise, even if from the federal government. And I mean defend—with skill, and organizational knowhow and the only thing these people understand,The Gun that is our prerogative to hold as free white Americans. . .

Right on.

O.K., action to report.

Yesterday, Monday, I get a message on the machine from a Rabbi Joshua Gruen, of the Synagogue of Evolutionary Judaism, on West Ninety-eighth: it is in my interest that we meet as soon as possible. Hmm. Clearly not one of the kooks. I call back. Cordial, but will answer no questions over the phone. So O.K., this is what detectives do, Lord, they investigate. Sounded a serious young man, one religioso to another—mufti or collar? I go for the collar.

The synagogue a brownstone between West End and Riverside Drive. A steep flight of granite steps to the front door. I deduce that Evolutionary Judaism includes aerobics. Confirmed when I am admitted. Joshua (my new friend) a trim five-nine in sweatshirt, jeans, running shoes. Gives me a firm handshake. Maybe thirty-two, thirty-four, good chin, well-curved forehead. A knitted yarmulke riding the top of his wavy black hair.

Shows me his synagogue: a converted parlor cum living room with an ark at one end, a platform table to read the Torah on, shelves with prayer books, and a few rows of bridge chairs, and that's it.

Second floor, introduces me to his wife, who puts her caller on hold, stands up from her desk to shake hands, she, too, a rabbi, Sarah Blumenthal, in blouse and slacks, pretty smile, high cheekbones, no cosmetics, needs none, light hair short, au courant cut, granny specs, Lord my heart. She is one of the assistant rabbis at Temple Emanu-El. What if Trish went for her

"My attorney feels it's unwise for me to continue to represent you."

D.D., wore the collar, celebrated the Eucharist with me? O.K., laugh, but it's not funny when I think about it, not funny at all.

Third floor, I meet the children, boys two and four, in their native habitat of primary-color wall boxes filled with stuffed animals. They cling to the flanks of their dark Guatemalan nanny, who is also introduced like a member of the family . . .

On the back wall of the third-floor landing is an iron ladder. Joshua Gruen ascends, opens a trapdoor, climbs out. A moment later his head appears against the blue sky. He beckons me upward, poor winded Pem so stress-tested and entranced . . . so determined to make it look effortless I can think of nothing else.

I stand finally on the flat roof, the old apartment houses of West End Avenue and Riverside Drive looming at either end of this block of chimneyed brownstone roofs, and try to catch my breath while smiling at the same time. The autumn sun behind the apartment houses, the late-afternoon river breeze on my face. I'm feeling the exhilaration and slight vertigo of roof-standing . . . and don't begin to think—until snapped to attention by the Rabbi's puzzled, frankly inquiring gaze that asks why do I think he's brought me here—why he's brought me here. His hands in his pockets, he points with his chin to the Ninety-eighth Street frontage, where, lying flat on the black tarred roof, its transverse exactly parallel to the front of the building, its upright pressed against the granite pediment, the eight-foot hollow brass cross of St. Timothy's, Episcopal, lies tarnished and shining in the autumn sun.

I suppose I knew I'd found it from the moment I heard the Rabbi's voice on the answering machine. I bend down for a closer look. There are the old nicks and dents. Some new ones, too. It's not all of a piece, which I hadn't known: the arms are bolted to the upright in a kind of mortise-and-tenon idea. I lift it at the foot. It is not that heavy but clearly too much cross to bear on the stations of the I.R.T.

I'D been just about convinced it was, in fact, a new sect of some kind. You do let this happen, Lord, ideas of You bud with the profligacy of viruses. I thought, Well, I'll keep a vigil from across the street, watch them take my church apart brick by brick. Maybe I'll help them. They'll reassemble it somewhere as a folk church of some kind. A bizarre expression of their simple faith. Maybe I'll drop in, listen to the sermon now and then. Learn something . . .

Then my other idea, admittedly paranoid: it would end up as an installation in SoHo. Some crazy artist—let me wait a few months, a year, and I'd look in a gallery window and see it there, duly embellished, a statement. People standing there drinking white wine. So that was the secular version. I thought I had all bases covered. I am shaken.

How did Rabbi Joshua Gruen know it was there?

An anonymous phone call. A man's voice. Hello, Rabbi Gruen? Your roof is burning.

The roof was burning?

If the children had been in the house I would have gotten them out and called the fire department. As it was, I grabbed our kitchen extinguisher and up I came. Not the smartest thing. Of course, the roof was not burning. But, modest as it is, this is a synagogue. A place for prayer and study. And, as you see, a Jewish family occupies the upper floors. So was he wrong, the caller?

He bites his lip, dark-brown eyes looking me in the eye. It is an execrable symbol to him. Burning its brand on his synagogue. Burning down, floor through floor, like the template of a Christian church. I want to tell him I'm on the Committee for Ecumenical Theology of the Trans-Religious Fellowship. A member of the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

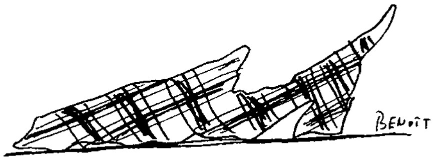
This is deplorable. I am really sorry about this.

It's hardly your fault.

I know, I say. But this city is getting weirder by the minute.

THE rabbis offer me a cup of coffee. We sit in the kitchen. I feel quite close to them, both our houses of worship desecrated, the entire Judeo-Christian heritage trashed.

This gang's been preying on me for months. And for what they've gotten for their effort, I mean one hit on a dry cleaner would have done as much. Listen, Rabbi—



Joshua.

Joshua. Do you read detective stories?

He clears his throat, blushes.

Only all the time, Sarah Blumenthal says, smiling at him.

Well, let's put our minds together. We've got two mysteries going here.

Why two?

This gang. I can't believe their intent was, ultimately, to commit an anti-Semitic act. They have no intent. They lack sense. They're like overgrown children. They're not of this world. And all the way from the Lower East Side to the Upper West Side? No, that's asking too much of them.

So this is someone else?

It must be. A good two weeks went by. Somebody took the cross off their hands—if they didn't happen to find it in a Dumpster. I mean, the police told me it had no value, but if someone wants it it has value, right? And then this second one or more persons had the intent. But how did they get it onto the roof? And nobody saw them, nobody heard them?

I was on the case now, asking questions, my nostrils flaring. I was enjoying myself. Good Lord, Lord, should I have been a detective? Was that my true calling?

Angelina, whom I think you met with the children: she heard noises from the roof one morning. We were already gone. That was the day I went to see my father, Sarah says, looking to Joshua for confirmation.

And I'd gone running, Joshua says.

But the noise didn't last long and Angelina thought no more of it—thought that it was a repairman of some sort. I assume they came up through one of the houses on the block. The roofs abut.

Did you go down the block? Did you ring bells?

Joshua shook his head.

What about the cops?

They exchange glances. Please, says Joshua. The congregation is new, just getting its legs. We're trying to make something viable for today—theologically, communally. A dozen or so families, just a beginning. A green shoot. The last thing we want is for this to get out. We don't need that kind of publicity. Besides, he says, that's what they want, whoever did this.

We don't accept the I.D. of victim,

says Sarah Blumenthal, looking me in the eye.

And now I tell You, Lord, as I sit here back in my own study, in this bare ruined choir, I am exceptionally sorry for myself this evening, lacking as I do a companion like Sarah Blumenthal. This is not lust, and You know I would admit it if it were. No, but I think how quickly I took to her, how comfortable I was made, how naturally welcomed I felt under these difficult circumstances, there is a freshness and honesty about these people, both of them, I mean, they were so present in the moment, so self-possessed, a wonderful young couple with a quietly dedicated life, such a powerful family stronghold they make, and, oh Lord, he is one lucky rabbi, Joshua Gruen, to have such a beautiful devout by his side.

It was Sarah, apparently, who made the connection. He was sitting there trying to figure out how to handle it and she had come in from a conference somewhere and when he told her what was on the roof she wondered if that was the missing crucifix she had read about in the newspaper.

I hadn't read the piece and I was skeptical.

You thought it was just too strange, a news story right in your lap, Sarah says.

That's true. News is somewhere else. And to realize that you know more than the reporter knew? But we found the article.

He won't let me throw out anything, Sarah says.

Fortunately, in this case, says the husband to the wife.

It's like living in the Library of Congress.

So, thanks to Sarah, we now have the rightful owner.

She glances at me, colors a bit. Removes her glasses, the scholar, and pinches the bridge of her nose. I see her eyes in the instant before the specs go back on. Nearsighted, like a little girl I loved in grade school.

I am extremely grateful, I say to my new friends. This is, in addition to everything else, a mitzvah you've performed. Can I use your phone? I'm going to get a van up here. We can take it apart, wrap it up, and carry it right out the front door and no one will be the wiser.

I'm prepared to share the cost.

Thank you, that won't be necessary. I don't need to tell you, but my life has been hell lately. This is good coffee, but you don't happen to have something to drink, do you?

Sarah going to a wall cabinet. Will Scotch do?

Joshua, sighing, leans back in his chair. I could use something myself.

THE situation now: my cross dismantled and stacked like building materials behind the altar. It won't be put back together and hung in time for Sunday worship. That's fine, I can make a sermon out of that. The shadow is there, the shadow of the cross on the apse. We will offer our prayers to God in the name of His Indelible Son, Jesus Christ. Not bad, Pem, you can still pull these things out of a hat when you want to.

WHAT am I to make of this strange night culture of stealth sickos, these mindless thieves of the valueless giggling through the streets, carrying what? whatever it was! through the watery precincts of urban nihilism . . . their wit, their glimmering dying recognition of something that once had a significance they laughingly cannot remember. Jesus, there's not even sacrilege there. A dog stealing a bone knows more what he's up to.

A PHONE call just now from Joshua. If we're going to be detectives about this, we start with what we know, isn't that what you did? What I know, what I start with, is that no Jewish person would have stolen your crucifix. It would not occur to him. Even in the depths of some drug-induced confusion.

I shouldn't think so, I say, thinking, Why does Joshua feel he has to rule this out?

But as you also said something like this has no street value unless someone wants it. Then it has value.

To an already in place, raging anti-Semite, for example.

Yes, that's the likelihood. This is a mixed neighborhood. There may be people who don't like a synagogue on their block. I've not been made aware of this, but it's always possible.

Right.

But it's also possible . . . placing that cross on my roof, well, that is something that could have been arranged by an ultra-orthodox fanatic. That's possible, too.

Good God!

We have our extremists, our fundamentalists, just as you have. There are some for whom what Sarah and I are doing, struggling to redesign, revalidate our faith—well, in their eyes it is tantamount

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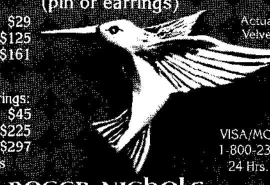

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"Clemson here. How may I disappoint you?"

• •

to apostasy. What do you think of that for a theory?

Very generous of you, Joshua. But I don't buy it, I say. I mean, I can't think that it's likely. Why would it be?

The voice that told me my roof was burning? That was a Jewish thing to say. Of course, I don't know for sure, I may be all wrong. But it's something to think about. Tell me, Father—

Tom—

Tom. You're a bit older, you've seen more, given more thought to these things. Wherever you look in the world now, God belongs to the atavists. And they're so fierce, these people, so sure of themselves—as if all human knowledge since Scripture were not also God's revelation! I mean, is time a loop? Do you have the same feeling I have—that everything seems to be running backward? That civilization is in reverse?

Oh, my dear Rabbi . . . where does that leave us? Because maybe that's what faith is. That's what faith does. Whereas I am beginning to think that to hold in abeyance and irresolution any firm conviction of God, or of an afterlife with Him, warrants walking in His Spirit, somehow.

Monday. The front doors are padlocked. In the rectory kitchen, leaning back on the two hind legs of his chair and reading *People*, is St. Timothy's newly hired, classically indolent private security guard.

I am comforted, too, by the woman at Ecstatic Reps. She is there, as usual, walking in place, earphones clamped on her head, her large hocks in their black tights shifting up and dropping back down like Sisyphean boulders. As the afternoon darkens, she'll be broken up and splashed in the greens and pale lavenders of the light refractions on the window.

So everything is as it should be, the world's in its place. The wall clock ticks. I have nothing to worry about except what I'm going to say to the Bishop's examiners who will determine the course of the rest of my life.

This is what I will say for starters: "My dear colleagues, what you are here to examine today is not in the nature of a spiritual crisis. Let's get that clear. I have not broken down, cracked up, burned out, or caved in. True, my personal life is a shambles, my church is like a war ruin, and, since I am not one to seek counsel or join support groups, and God, as usual, has ignored my communications (let's be honest, Lord, not a letter, not a card), I do feel somewhat isolated. I will even admit that for the past few years, no, the past several years, I have not known what to do when in despair except walk the streets. Nevertheless, my ideas have substance, and, while you may find some of them alarming, I would entreat—would suggest, would recommend, would advise—I would advise you to confront them on their merits, and not as evidence of the psychological decline of a mind you once had some respect for. I mean, for which you once had some respect."

That's O.K. so far, isn't it, Lord? Sort of taking it to them? Maybe a bit touchy. After all, what could they have in mind? In order of probability: one, a warning; two, a formal reprimand; three, censure; four, a month or so in therapeutic retreat followed by a brilliantly remote reassignment wherein I'm never to be heard from again; five, early retirement with or without full benefits; six, defrocking; seven, the Big Ex. Whatthahell! By the way, Lord, what are these "ideas of substance" I've promised them in the above? The phrase came trippingly off the tongue. I trust You will enlighten me. What with today's shortened attention span I don't need ninety-five, I can get by with just one or two. The point is, whatever I say will alarm them. Nothing of a church is shakier than its doctrine. That's why they guard it with their lives. I mean, just to lay the "H" word on the table, it, heresy, is a legal concept, that's all. The shock is supposed to be Yours but the affront is to sectarian legality. A heretic can be of no more concern to You than someone kicked out of a building coöperative for playing the piano after ten. . . . So I pray, Lord, don't let me come up with something worth only a reprimand. Let me have the good stuff. Speak to me. Send me an E-mail. You were once heard to speak:

You Yourself are a word, though deemed by some to be unutterable,

You are said to be The Word, and I don't doubt You are the Last Word.

You're the Lord our Narrator, who made a text from nothing, at least that is our story of You.

So here is your servant, the Reverend Dr. Thomas Pemberton, the almost no longer rector of St. Timothy's, Episcopal, addressing You in one of your own inventions, one of your intonational systems of clicks and grunts, glottal stops and trills.

Will You show him no mercy, this poor soul tormented in his nostalgia for Your Only Begotten Son? He has failed his training as a detective, having solved nothing.

May he nevertheless pursue You? God? The Mystery? ♦

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

ANTI-CLIMAX

No sex, please, we're readers.

BY JONATHAN FRANZEN

In the erotic broadsheets of the *Times*, which every morning lies on my breakfast table, silently awaiting my attention, there recently appeared what seemed to me a wholly reasonable Op-Ed piece by Adam Hochschild on the horror of airport television. "At gates cursed with the TV's," Hochschild wrote, "most of the passengers are trying to talk, work or read. But the penetrating TV noise needles itself into the conversations and onto the pages." His complaint soon brought replies from the Refiners, Resonators, and Rebutters who typically write letters to the *Times*. One Refiner suggested that airport TVs might play silently with captions. One Resonator wrote movingly of the kindred horror of "smelling and hearing popcorn" in movie theatres; another invited readers to "try spending a night in any moderately priced hotel without enduring the buzz-muffle of televised talk." (The rage palpable in the word "buzz-muffle"! Nothing more reliably bolsters my faith in humanity than the dyspepsia of letters to the *Times*.) There was also, however, a classic Rebuttal from the president of Turner Private Networks, who claimed, bizarrely, that airport TV is "not intrusive" and, more persuasively, that Hochschild is "more alone than he might think." Apparently, Nielsen surveys show that ninety-five per cent of air travellers believe that television enhances the airport environment, and eighty-nine per cent believe that "it makes the time spent in an airport more worthwhile." I pitied Hochschild when I read this. Here he is, trying bravely to give voice to a silent majority of sufferers, hoping to incite communal outrage, when along comes somebody with a figure—*ninety-five per cent*—to knock his legs out from under him. He's mugged by a norm.

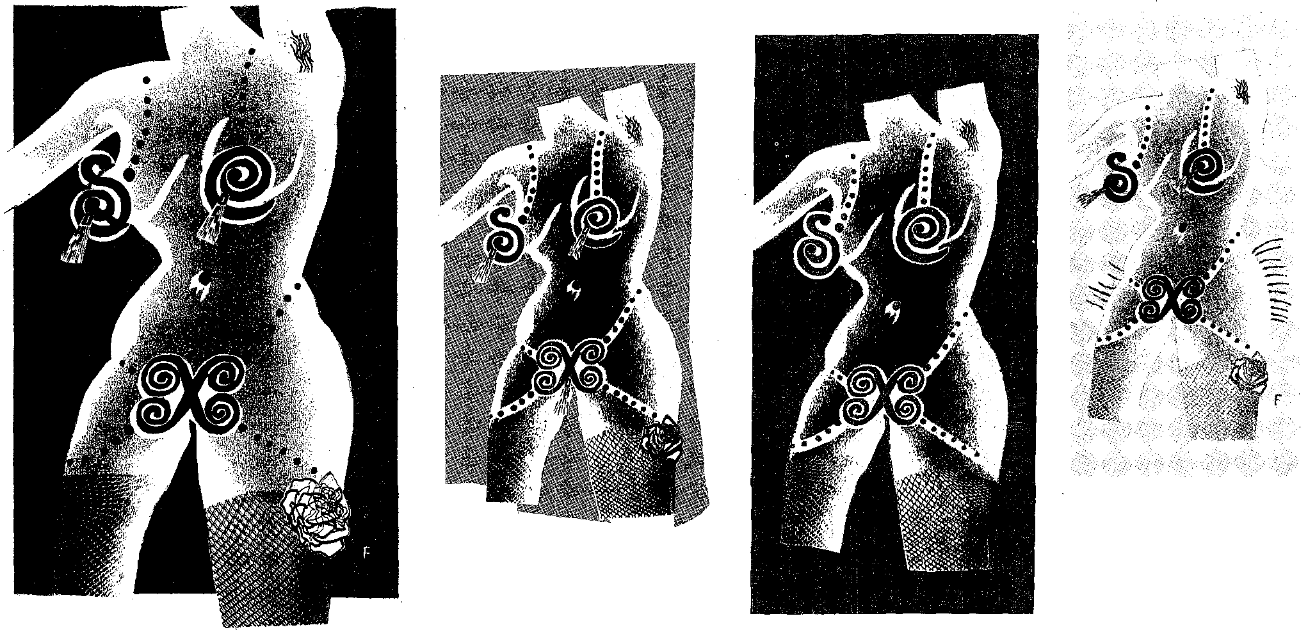
This business of norms, which are a fixture of the information age—as friends or as tyrants, depending on how normal you are—was on my mind this winter when I embarked on a survey of contemporary popular sex books and was confronted with evidence that I am one of the few heterosexual men in America who are not turned on by elaborate lingerie. In bookstores, pop sex books are usually shelved under Health (a topic of such importance to the culture that all the books now published, including novels, could arguably be shelved there), and, since sexual "health" is impossible to define objectively, they offer the reader a uniquely rich array of normative pronouncements. "Matching lacy bra and panties, garter belt and stockings, bustiers, G-strings, and teddies—most men can't get enough of this stuff," Sydney Biddle Barrows, the Mayflower Madam, writes in "Just Between Us Girls." She later adds, "Whatever the reason, bustiers and merry widows seem to be almost universally popular garments." Dr. Susan Block, in "The 10 Commandments of Pleasure," commands the female reader, "Wear lingerie," and explains that "men who love sex love a woman who thinks about it, dresses up for it." Susan Crain Bakos, the author of "Sexational Secrets," concurs: "Men love it when you come to bed in high heels, bustier, and stockings." Lest these generalizations seem unscientific, the authors of "Sex: A Man's Guide" report that, according to their survey of *Men's Health* readers, lingerie is "without a doubt . . . the U.S. male's favorite erotic aid."

I have no objection to a nice bra, still less to being invited to remove one. But brothelwear of the kind sold at Frederick's of Hollywood or Victoria's Secret seems to me scarcely less hokey than a Super Bowl half-time show. What I feel when I hear that the mainstream actually *buys* this stuff is the same garden-variety alienation I feel on learning that Hootie & the Blowfish sold thirteen million copies of their first record, or that the American male's dream date is Cindy Crawford. In a sense, I'm proud of not being like everybody else. Like everybody else, though, I'm anxious about sex, and with sex the recognition that I'm not like everybody else leads directly to the worry that I'm not as good as—or, at any rate, not having as much fun as—everybody else.

Sexual anxiety is primal: physical love has always carried the risk that one's most naked self will be rejected. If Americans today are especially anxious, the consensus seems to be that it's because of "changing sex roles" and "media images of sex" and so forth. In fact, we're simply experiencing the anxiety of a free market. Contraception and the ease of divorce have removed the fetters from the economy of sex, and, like the citizens of present-day Dresden and Leipzig, we all want to believe we're better off under a regime in which even the poorest man can dream of wealth. But as the old walls of repression tumble down, many Americans—discarded first wives, who are like the workers displaced from a Trabant factory; or sexually inept men, who are the equivalent of command-economy bureaucrats—have grown nostalgic for the old state monopolies. What are The Rules if not an attempt to re-regulate an economy run scarily amok?

Until The Rules become universal, though, such comfort as can be found in the market economy comes principally from norms. Are you worried about the size of your penis? According to "Sex: A Man's Guide," most men's erections are between six and seven inches long. Worried about the architecture of your clitoris? According to Betty Dodson, in the revised edition of her "Sex for One: The Joy of Selfloving," the variations are "astounding." Worried about frequency? "Americans do not have a secret life of abundant sex," the researchers of "Sex in America" concluded. Worried about how long it takes you to come? On average, says Sydney Barrows, it takes a woman eighteen minutes, a man just three.

The problem with relying on norms for comfort, however, is not only that you may fail to meet them but that you may meet them all too well. Who really wants to be sexually just like everybody else? Isn't the bedroom the place where I expect, rather, to feel special? Unique, even? The last thing I want is to be reminded of the vaguely icky fact that across the country millions of other people are having sex. This is the conundrum of the individual confronting masses about which he can't help knowing more than he'd like to know: I want to be alone, but not too alone. I want to be the same but different.



POPULAR sex books are only a small part of the sex industry, but one could argue that they are the most representative part, in that they are books. If a sexual fetish is understood as a displacement of genital energies, then language, even more than lingerie, is by far the most prevalent paraphilia in the country today. You can't show a bare breast on network television, but there's no limit to the backdoor prurience of talk about rape, incest, and sexual harassment. Cybersex and phone sex are a vastly more popular way of avoiding intimate fluids than is the worship of, say, knees or feet.

Although our pop sex writers seem to recognize the ascendance of language, they don't trust their readers to know how, or even when, to use it. In "Sex: A Man's Guide" we learn that lovers can be encouraged to talk dirty by making lists of "clinical" and "dirty" terms and comparing them. Dr. Block reels off forty-five possible pet names for a penis, including "peenie-weenie," "dipstick," and "lovepump," and commands her readers, "Take your pick." (More adventurous souls are urged to "make up something special" to suit their "very special wonder worm.") Susan Bakos cues Tantric lovers to the appropriate moment for "whispered terms of endearment," and she suggests that women who want to learn to talk dirty rent some video porn and study it carefully. "Once you are comfortable saying the words as a scriptwriter wrote them," she tells us, "you can personalize them to make it sound more like you speaking."

FILIP PAGOWSKI

Reading a book of expert sexual instruction must rank near the bottom on the scale of erotic pastimes—somewhere below peeling an orange, not far above flossing. One problem is that, although the intention is precisely the opposite, these books collectively and individually make the world of sex seem very small. Never mind that there are only so many ways to fit body parts together or that Alex Comfort has already said and said well, in works that have sold better than eight million copies, pretty much all there is to say about it. There seems, in general, to be far too little lore to go around. Author after author derives the etymology of "cunnilingus," stresses the importance of doing "Kegel" exercises to strengthen the pubococcygeal muscles, and quotes Shakespeare on the topic of alcohol ("It provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance"). Author after author insists that men are "visual creatures" and that the size of a penis matters less than what its owner does with it. When the lore runs out, the advice turns bleakly otiose. Dr. Block commands lovers, "Use babytalk, or at least 'pet names.' " In "Sexational Secrets," whose subtitle promises "exotic advice your mother never told you," Susan Bakos instructs masturbating men to use, "in various combinations," the Slow Single Stroke, the Fast Single Stroke, the Slow Two-Hand Stroke, the Fast Two-Hand Stroke, the Cupped Hand, the Finger Stroke, the Wrist Pump, the Slap, the Beat, the Rub, the Squeeze Stroke, the Open-Hand Stroke, and the Vagina Simulator Stroke; instructions for each are provided.

The italicized cheerfulness with which pop sex authors convey the useless and the banal is identical to that of the newscasters on airport TV, whose most striking talent is the ability to summon (or to fake, like an orgasm) fresh wonderment over the latest wrinkle in automobile safety. Trying to make fascinating and new what is neither, the authors tirelessly coin neologisms. They toss off "sexation," "primemate," "soulgasm," and "partnersex" with the supreme self-assurance that American audiences now demand from professional exhibitionists. Dr. Block, who calls herself an "erotic philosopher," illustrates her commandments with glimpses of her husband and herself in bed: "Max grunts like a bonobo chimp when he wants to go down on me, then moans and coos and tells me I'm delicious as he slurps away." For people who have never shared a fantasy with their lovers but "would like to try," the philosopher has this advice: "Watch *The Dr. Susan Block Show* together—that'll stimulate your fantasies!"

Not every pop sex book points to television quite this literally, but all the books seem bent on enmeshing sex (formerly life's one free pleasure) in the web of consumer spending. The reader is relentlessly exhorted to buy erotic videos, high-quality lingerie, candles, champagne, incense, oils, vibrators, perfumes, bubble-bath mix. Betty Dodson, Ph.D., sounds less like a prophet of an autoerotic utopia than like an infomercial host: she twice gives readers an address from which her videos may be

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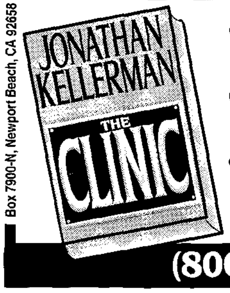

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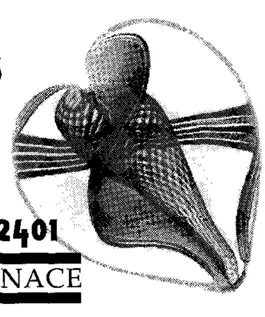

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ordered. Sidney Barrows suggests that renting luxury cars, wearing full-length fur coats, and taking expensive vacations will spice up the deadliest marriage. In "Sexational Secrets" Susan Bakos sets out to gather for the presumably impecunious reader the rarefied sexual know-how that members of the moneyed classes spend thousands to obtain. Apparently, the best sex is being had today by a lucky international élite who can afford six hundred and twenty-five dollars for multiple-orgasm workshops. Whether Bakos is interviewing "beautiful French courtesans" or a master of Kundalini yoga, she goes out of her way to stress the demographics of their clientele. They are "sheiks," they live in "secluded" suburban homes, they wear "business suits" and drink "flavored coffees."

As for the benefits of better sex, Betty Dodson reports that after attending her slide show on the vulva a woman asked for a raise at work "—and got it!" (Dodson attributes the woman's enhanced self-esteem to becoming "cunt positive.") And a raise at work is small potatoes compared with these authors' promises, expressed and implied, for a sexually liberated society as a whole. We can look forward to the disappearance of "prejudice and bigotry, heartache and misery, loneliness and violence"; the obsolescence of guns and missiles; the release of "the spirit of creativity" and the renewal of "the joy of living." Here is Dodson's "futuristic fantasy" of liberation:

> It's New Year's Eve, 1999. All the television networks have agreed to let me produce "Orgasms Across America." Every TV screen will be showing high-tech, fine-art porn created by the best talent this country has to offer. At the stroke of midnight, the entire population will be masturbating to orgasm for World Peace.

It was Mao's nasty inspiration that for a revolution truly to succeed it must never stop, and our own culture's version of non-stop revolution is collected and distilled in pop sex books: a ceaseless propaganda of self-congratulation wedded to a ceaseless invocation of the still powerful Enemy. If victory in the Sexual Revolution should ever be declared, people might no longer seek instruction and guidance from commercial sources. Consequently, our experts fill their books with constant reminders of how much better off we are than our grandparents. They laud the science of Alfred Kinsey and Masters and Johnson; they gleefully puncture the myth of the Freudian "mature" vaginal orgasm; they ridicule, under such banners as "The Annals of Ignorance," the hopeless stupidity of human beings a century ago. But the running dogs of sexual repression still hunt in packs outside our doors. One author blames "narrow, paternalistic, 1950s-style family values" and our "sex-negative, genital-shaming upbringing," while another blames "traditional marriage" and "anti-porn feminists who are intent on preserving their romantic illusions." Absolutely everyone blames religion. To hear the experts tell it, we live in a sexually repressed nation, under the dark thrall of Catholicism, fundamentalism, and ignorance.

I wonder what planet these experts are on. They seem blind to the way today's fifteen-year-olds act and dress, oblivious to the atmosphere of sexual license of which they themselves are the direct beneficiaries, and wholly ignorant of the large body of recent scholarship, by Peter Gay and others, that has revealed beneath the veneer of Victorian "repression" a universe of sexual experience as richly ramified as our own. There doubtless still exist a few American teen-agers who choose to give greater weight in their lives to religious scruples than to pop culture. But who is Dr. Susan Block to tell these kids they've chosen badly? As for the overwhelming majority of young people who pay more attention to "Baywatch" than to the Bible, they are indeed lucky to live in a time when it's common knowledge that, for example, women have orgasms and few, if any of them, are vaginal. It's worth pointing out, though, that what made this knowledge common was the growing power of women, rather than the other way around.

However manfully I resist nostalgia, Victorian silences appeal to me. Dr. Block, in an uncharacteristic fit of wisdom, observes, "The irony of creating a taboo is that, once something is forbidden, it often becomes very interesting." Sex in a time of ostensible repression at least had the benefit of carving out a space of privacy. Lovers defined themselves in opposition to the official culture, which had the effect of making every discovery *personal.* There's something profoundly boring about the vision that is promulgated, if only as an ideal, by today's experts: a long life of vigorous, non-stop, "fulfilling" sex, and the identical story in every household. Although it pains me to remember how innocent I was in my early twenties, I have no desire to rewrite my life. To do so would eliminate those moments when whole vistas of experience opened out of nowhere, moments when I thought, So *this* is what it's like. Just as every generation needs to feel that it has invented sex—"Sexual intercourse began / In nineteen sixty-three / (Which was rather late for me)" was Philip Larkin's imperfectly ironic lament—we all deserve our own dry spells and our own revolutions. They're what make our lives good stories.

Unfortunately, stories like these are easily lost amid the slick certitudes of our media culture: that a heavy enough barrage of information produces enlightenment, and that incessant communication produces communities. Susie Bright and Susan Block and Dr. Ruth are loud and cable-ready. You can turn them on, but you can't turn them off. They yammer on about the frenulum, the perineum, the G-spot, the squeeze technique, bonobo chimpanzees and vibrators, teddies and garter belts, "eargasms" and "toegasms." Their work *creates* the bumbling amateur. Their discovery of sexual "technique" *creates* a population bereft of technique. The popular culture they belong to thus resembles an MTV beach party. From the outside, the party looks like fun, but for passive viewers its most salient feature is that they haven't been invited to it. "Are some people having multiple orgasms . . . electrifying oral experiences, incredible and emotionally intense lovemaking sessions that last for hours?" Susan Bakos asks the reader. "Unbelievable as it may sound—yes. Why not you?" A lonely reader could be forgiven for replying: Because there's a television in my bedroom.

The term "paraphilia" connotes perversion, something unhealthy. But, while there's little doubt that our culture promotes a paraphiliac displacement from the genital to the verbal, this displacement is not intrinsically diseased. The reason that reading a sex book can assuage loneliness (at least momentarily) is that sex for human beings is as much imaginative as it is biological. When we make love, we forever have in our heads an image of ourselves making love. And, although substituting a hot text for a warm body may be nothing but a way of tricking our genitals, what's remarkable is that the trick so often works. When I was fourteen, I canvassed and recanvassed my Webster's Collegiate for words like "intercourse." Scouring "Ann Landers Talks to Teenagers About Sex" for the dirty bits, I was excited to learn that the mere sight of "a girl in a tight sweater" is sufficient to arouse a teen-age boy.

For the grownup who seeks such written thrills but lacks the resources to compile his own supply of frisson-inducing texts, there now exists "The Joy of Writing Sex: A Guide for Fiction Writers," a kind of para-paraphiliac volume, by the novelist Elizabeth Benedict. This new "Joy" consists mainly of sex scenes excerpted from the works of contemporary fiction writers and framed by Benedict's own chirpy, sanitizing glosses. Whatever subversive thrills "Portnoy's Complaint" might provide are unlikely to survive an analysis like this: "Roth manages to turn the cliché of the teenage boy's first visit to a whore into a rich, sidesplittingly funny scene that leads us back again to the themes of the novel, the struggle between being a good Jew and a good Jewish son and being as naughty as your libido begs you to be." Benedict confides that a big attraction of writing the manual was that she could "read sexy books and think for long periods of nothing but sex." That she considers this an enviable circumstance may explain the deep kinship—the quite striking parallels—between her product and the products of pop sex authors. Its price sticker is its destiny.

Like the pop-sexers, Benedict congratulates our age on its enlightenment and congratulates her readers on their good fortune in having come of age after the publication of "Fear of Flying." She alludes to the "incalculable tragedies of self-censorship" that befell authors in the dark ages before 1960, and she hints at the evil forces (Puritanism, fundamentalists, sexually repressive governments) that threaten our precarious liberty. Although she, like Dr. Block, briefly acknowledges the excitement that taboos generate ("Now that we can say anything, what else is there to say?"), pursuing this argument would undermine her project, so she doesn't. Similarly uneasy is her recognition that divorcing sex-scene technique from the larger challenges of writing good fiction is as useless as divorcing sexual technique from the challenge of loving someone. Good sex writing, it turns out, is a lot like good fiction writing in general. It has, she says, "tension, dramatic conflict, character development, insights, metaphors and surprises." These qualities are the Slow and Fast One- and Two-Handed Strokes to which Benedict returns, in various combinations, throughout the book. Avoid clichés, she advises—or at least "give them a unique twist." Try to "make the writing interesting." Don't forget: "You need not be explicit but you must be specific." And if it doesn't fit, you must acquit.

Although Benedict believes that she can liberate the reader from the "demons" of self-censorship, she's vague on exactly how

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Man in the Box, by Thomas Moran (Riverhead; $21.95). A Jewish doctor passing through a remote Austrian village in the nineteen-thirties performs an emergency appendectomy to save a boy's life (the father later jokes about keeping an eye on the Jew "in case he'd felt like clipping any foreskins for good measure"); the doctor refuses payment and leaves the next morning. Years later, he returns, fleeing the Nazis, and the boy's father decides to hide him in the barn. For the rest of the war, the boy and his best friend, a blind girl called Sigi, tend to "the Jew in the box": feeding him, mucking out his concealed stall, listening to him remember. As in the diary of Anne Frank, the blend of confinement, sexual awakening, and cruelty in this novel makes for a potent and unblinking coming-of-age tale.

The House on Brooke Street, by Neil Bartlett (Dutton; $21.95). A colorless clerk at Selfridge's in nineteen-twenties London encounters his exact double in looks and in taste for men. The only difference is that Clive Vivian is rich. Clive's mansion is full of wonders—secret passages and soundproof rooms—but most wonderful is the beautiful young man who is the only servant there. Concealed within this slightly sinister tale of unspoken exchanges and "accidental" encounters is a love story; its nature is touching, a little sentimental, and a complete surprise.

Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America, by John M. Barry (Simon & Schuster; $27.50). This story of human defeat by a savage, unpredictable river has the power of an epic. The flood of 1927, three times greater than the flood of 1993, was an unprecedented disaster that spurred a political innovation. Congress's agreement to rebuild the Mississippi's shattered flood-control system marked the federal government's first assumption of full financial responsibility for a regional calamity. Much of the book recounts how the greed of New Orleans bankers and Delta planters increased the sufferings of the rural poor. The victims had their revenge: the bankers lost control of Louisiana when the voters installed Huey Long as governor, and the planters faced a labor shortage after the blacks moved North. Barry's book is a virtuoso piece of exposition.

The Cliff Walk, by Don J. Snyder (Little, Brown; $23.95). When the author is fired by Colgate University, he never doubts that his brilliance and charm will soon gain him entrance to a new ivory tower. Instead, he is forced to move his family of five to Maine in the off season. With his pride and his checking account steadily eroding, he concocts wild schemes—stealing golf balls from a nearby course with his son, and secretly contemplating selling his unborn child. Finally, Snyder gives his last seventeen hundred dollars to a dying woman so she can take her children to Disney World. This dire act propels him into a real job—building a house—and toward a vision of self that depends more on strength than on prestige.

this occurs. At one point, she implies that liberation is simply a matter of gumption: "Question: Who are your censors and how do you silence them? Answer: Just do it." But a book that intends to give us "permission to indulge" new possibilities requires an exemplary performer, and, as with Betty Dodson, whose "Sex for One: The Joy of Selfloving" mainly retails the professional triumphs of Betty Dodson, the work that most interests Benedict is her own. She includes four substantial excerpts from her fiction, and she praises them with charming artlessness. ("These are emotionally complex scenes. . . . ") At the same time, she reminds us that *her* skills didn't come from any manual. In her own work, she says, she didn't "consciously try to create conflict or to inject surprises"—although, sure enough, she now realizes "how important those elements are."

The fraud of "The Joy of Writing Sex" is meaner than the fraud of sex manuals, since every man can be a king in bed and every woman a queen but not everyone can be a successful novelist. Nietzsche said, "Books for all the world are always foul-smelling books; the smell of small people clings to them." The truth, of course, may be that I'm no larger than the next man. But who wants to know a truth like this? Just as every lover at some level believes that he makes love as it's made nowhere else on the planet, so every artist clings for dear life to the illusion that the art he's producing is vital, necessary, and unique.

Aesthetic élitism, sexual snobbery: these are not the reprehensible attitudes that our culture makes them out to be. They're the efforts of the individual to secure a small space of privacy within the prevailing din. All people should be élitists—and keep it to themselves.

THE one welcome service that Benedict performs in "Joy" is her surgical removal of sex scenes from their context. The more sincerely explicit a novel's dirty bits are, I think, the more they beg to be removed. When I was a teen-ager, novels were Trojan horses by means of which titillation could sometimes be smuggled into my sheltered life. Over the years, though, I've come to dread the approach of sex scenes in serious fiction. Call it the orgasmic collapse: the more absorbing the story, the more I dread it. Often the sentences begin to lengthen Joyceanly. My own anxiety rises sympathetically with the author's, and soon enough the fragile bubble of the imaginative world is pricked by the hard exigencies of naming body parts and movements—the sameness of it all. When the sex is persuasively rendered, it tends to read autobiographically, and there are limits to my desire for immersion in a stranger's biochemistry. A few geniuses—Philip Roth may be one of them—have the skill or the bravado to get away with explicit sex, but in most novels, even otherwise excellent ones, the corporeal nomenclature is hopelessly contaminated through its previous use by writers whose aim is simply to turn the reader on.

Jacques Derrida once sought to demonstrate, in his sublimely contortionist essay "White Mythology," that language is such a self-contained system that even a word as basic as "sun" cannot be proved, by anyone using language, to refer to an objective, extralinguistic Sun. A candle is *like* a small sun, but the sun is *like* a large candle; examined closely, language turns out to operate through the lateral associations of metaphor, rather than through the vertical identifications of naming. So what is "sex"? Everything is like it, and it's like everything—like food, like drugs, like reading and writing, like deal-making, like war, like sport, like education, like the economy, like socializing. In the end, however, every orgasm is more or less the same. This may be why writing *about* sex is at once effective and boring. Language of the nominal, hot-slippery-cunt-ramrod-straight-dick variety both aims for and achieves its own closure. The orgasm is a kind of consumer purchase, and, one way or another, the language that attends it is always a kind of ad copy.

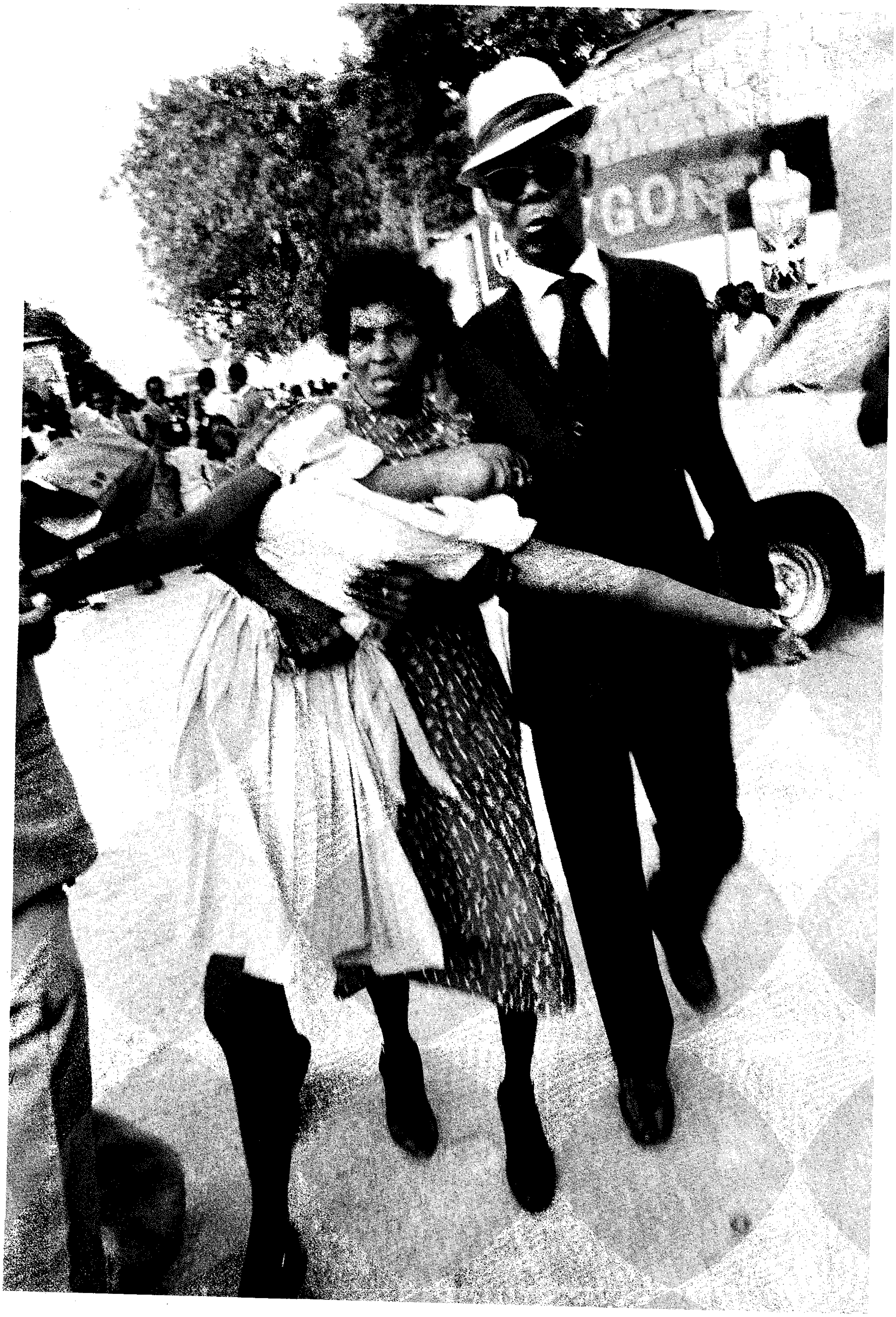
Language *as* sex, on the other hand, is fraught with the perils of an open-ended eros. When I'm in bed with a novel, I hope its author will be faithful to me. Right now I'm reading Nick Hornby's "High Fidelity," a flawed but beguiling sendup of male anxiety in which the narrator's girlfriend leaves him for a former upstairs neighbor, a man he now remembers was "something of a demon" in bed:

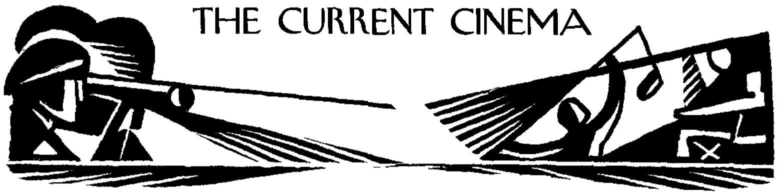
> "He goes on long enough," I said one night, when we were both lying awake, staring at the ceiling. "I should be so lucky," said Laura. This was a joke. We laughed. Ha, ha, we went. Ha, ha, ha. I'm not laughing now. Never has a joke filled me with such nausea and paranoia and insecurity and self-pity and dread and doubt.

When a full-blown sex scene finally looms on the narrative horizon, a hundred pages into a novel that's almost entirely about sex, my distaste at the prospect of orgasmic collapse is mitigated by a rare circumstance: I'm actually finding both the female love object (an American folk-rock singer) and the setting (a barren flat in a barren London neighborhood) quite sexy. Though I'm not looking forward to the hardened nipples and spurted semen that seem certain to follow, I'm prepared to forgive them, maybe even enjoy them. But when, after one last eight-page delay for awkward negotiations and precoital anxiety, Hornby gets his lovers into bed, the narrator abruptly declares, "I'm not going into all that other stuff, the who-did-what-to-whom stuff." Facing a choice between fidelity to "what happens" and fidelity to his reader, Hornby doesn't let the reader down. In one simple, curtain-dropping sentence he proves to me that he himself, at some point in his reading, has experienced the same uncomfortable suspense that I have just experienced, and for a moment, though I'm alone in bed with a book, I don't feel alone. For a moment, I belong to a group neither as big as a statistically significant sample nor as small as the naked self. It's a group of two, the faithful writer and the trusting reader. We're different but the same. ♦

BARON SAMEDI

By the mid-eighties, the New York photographer Bruce Gilden had been shooting gritty, often confrontational closeups on the streets of his home town for fifteen years. So his first trip to Haiti, in 1984, was something of a revelation to him. In the dusty zigzags of Cité Soleil, the largest shantytown in Port-au-Prince, he encountered confrontation at every glance—slaughtered pigs burning in the streets, two women carrying a bull's head by the horns, a body lying in a gutter and covered with flies. The results of his sixteen trips to the troubled country are collected in his book "Haiti," out this month; a related exhibit is on view at Gallery 292, in SoHo. Several of these unapologetic images document funeral processions, in which mourners faint in the grip of extreme emotion, only to come around and press on toward Baron Samedi, the lord of death.



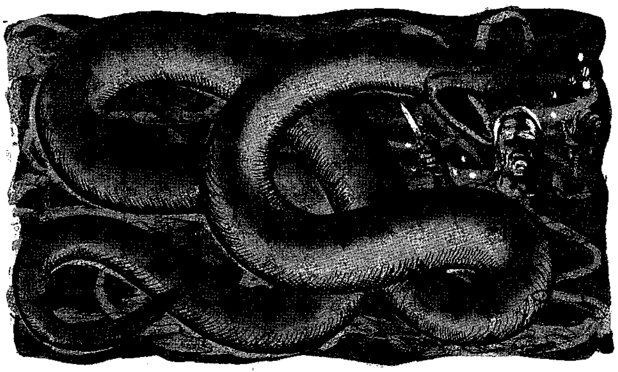


THE CURRENT CINEMA

COLD-BLOODED

Big mean snakes, and a contract killer.

BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY



The perfect killing machine: the title reptile of "Anaconda."

SINCE the summer action-movie season is fast approaching, bearing down on us at the speed of a hungry velociraptor, it's probably a good idea to start bracing ourselves for the onslaught. The most dangerous predator on the horizon is undoubtedly Spielberg's "The Lost World: Jurassic Park" (due May 23rd), in which Michael Crichton's unfriendly dinosaurs will roam the screen again. And because everyone will see this—you can run, but you can't hide, from the ravening packs of publicists and marketing experts which will soon be unleashed to hunt you down—canny moviegoers may want to prepare for the inevitable by taking in Luis Llosa's "Anaconda," a large-deadly-animal movie that might almost have been designed as a light workout to help flabby viewers get in shape for the big event. In "Anaconda," the usual ensemble of potential victims—an anthropologist, a beady-eyed villain, and a bunch of ordinary folks whose reactions range, predictably, from screeching hysteria to heroic resourcefulness—chugs down the Amazon in search of a lost tribe and instead winds up doing battle with several animatronic specimens of the title reptile: a gigantic and very mean constrictor-type snake, which one character describes, admiringly, as "the perfect killing machine." The anacondas, that is, are the latest variations on the shark in "Jaws," and at this point in monster-movie history, filmmakers no longer seem to mind if we know it; they can have us for lunch whether we see them coming or not.

"Anaconda," at least, is a swift and fairly merciful kill. The whole thing is over in an economical ninety minutes, and Llosa's approach to scaring the daylights out of the audience has, like the killing-machine beast itself, the brutal efficiency of single-mindedness. Although the picture tosses odd tidbits of scientific information our way, it does so quickly and offhandedly, and without pausing to make sure that we've digested them; it's almost comically impatient to get to the gruesome stuff. In a way, the movie's inability to disguise its low purpose is refreshing; you're sort of grateful to Llosa for getting the dirty job done with a minimum of fuss, and without requiring you to endure long, diversionary lectures on the balance of nature. For a movie about snakes, "Anaconda" is amazingly short on stealth. (Of course, the kind of snake we're dealing with here is so huge and so ruthless that it doesn't need a lot of cunning.) It's a strictly professional, money-up-front transaction: no sweet talk, no foreplay, and no lingering after the deed is done.

Although it's nice to see an action movie that doesn't pretend to be something it isn't, this frankness has a downside, because what "Anaconda" so unapologetically *is* isn't, in fact, much. The most interesting thing about the movie is that by operating with such clinical expertise it exposes the grim, impersonal quality at the heart of the scary-monster genre. Llosa and the screenwriters—Hans Bauer, Jim Cash, and Jack Epps, Jr.—are strikingly unconcerned with the human characters who are being stalked and, periodically, crushed and swallowed by the enormous snakes. Aside from a brief scene in which the leader of the expedition (played by Eric Stoltz) chats with the documentary filmmaker (Jennifer Lopez) who'll be recording the voyage, and then an equally perfunctory launching-the-boat scene, in which the river pilot (Vincent Castellanos) and the rest of the film crew (Ice Cube, Jonathan Hyde, Kari Wuhrer, and Owen Wilson) are introduced, there's no exposition in "Anaconda." The movie places all these people in jeopardy without bothering to tell us who they are in any but the most generic sense. And you realize as you're watching the picture that "Anaconda" doesn't need rounded characters any more than it needs ecology lessons: the audience understands perfectly that the people on the screen have no other function than that of potential victims, so why gild the lily?

"Anaconda" is shockingly honest in its attitude toward the characters, to the point of treating them all as essentially anonymous except for the villain, Paul Sarone (Jon Voight), who's explicitly presented as a kind of snake in human form. Sarone joins the expedition as a stranger in distress—his boat has run aground on the riverbank—and, once aboard, he claims he can lead the explorers to the tribe they're seeking. His actual agenda, it turns out, is to commandeer the boat to search for a legendary forty-foot anaconda, which he intends to capture alive. He's greedy (selling the snake would make his fortune), obsessive, and devious, and he clearly enjoys a higher position in the food chain than anyone else in the picture: in closeup after closeup, Voight chews great mouthfuls of scenery while the other actors look on blankly, as if wishing he'd leave some scraps for them. The cool, sizing-up gaze he trains on them is obviously predatory. It's significant that when Llosa uses the staple horror-movie technique of a subjective camera the point of view is always that of a wild animal—or of Sarone. Although Voight's creepy-crawly act is entertaining, it's hard to avoid the queasy feeling that the movie actually *identifies* with him—that he, the snakes, and the camera itself are all just drawing a bead on the victims and encouraging us to share the thrill.

When Sarone is finally gobbled up—as Robert Shaw's Quint was in "Jaws"—Llosa treats him to an extra-special subjective-camera shot: his terror-contorted face seen from *inside* the snake's throat. (And that's not the last we see of him; he emerges for a kind of curtain call a little later. No more will be revealed here.) "Anaconda" is so unself-consciously focussed on turning viewers on with the spectacle of destruction that it achieves a sort of pure abstraction. It may or may not be a reliable indication of the tone of the forthcoming summer movies, but it's probably not far off. And, if nothing else, it supplies a fine metaphor for the sort of question that audiences always start asking themselves around this time of year: Is that a giant snake up there, or is Hollywood just glad to see us?

THE veteran B-movie director George Armitage, who demonstrated an unmistakable flair for homicidal slapstick in "Miami Blues" (1990), gets another opportunity to exercise that specialized talent, in the new comedy "Grosse Pointe Blank," and the picture needs every bit of his skill. The screenplay—by Tom Jankiewicz, D. V. DeVincentis, Steve Pink, and John Cusack—has a high-concept premise: professional hit man goes home to attend his tenth high-school reunion. Cusack plays the contract killer, Martin Q. Blank; his home town is the affluent Detroit suburb Grosse Pointe. This is dismayingly cute: the punning allusion to John Boorman's violent hardboiled thriller "Point Blank" (1967) is already enough to put a viewer on guard, anticipating a barrage of ostentatious cleverness. The movie doesn't begin to live down to its title for a while, though, because Cusack is such a subtle, assured actor that he never has to go for a cheap laugh, and because Armitage's deadpan style keeps the action moving with a speedy, amusingly even rhythm: at first, both the star and the director appear to have the sense to play the outrageous material straight, and to treat the story itself as no more than a pretext for a series of revue-type sketches.

In the terrific opening half hour of "Grosse Pointe Blank," Cusack shuttles from one inspired comic duet to another: with Dan Aykroyd, as Blank's former mentor, now a rival contractor; with Joan Cusack, as his sympathetic and hilariously unfazable receptionist; and with Alan Arkin, as Dr. Oatman, his reluctant psychiatrist. Cusack's session with Arkin is a classic routine. Blank complains, on the couch, about his diminishing job satisfaction—funny idea. Even funnier is the idea that a hit man's shrink might feel, let's say, more than usually apprehensive about the outcome of the therapy. Poor Oatman is terrified of how Blank will react if he isn't satisfied with his treatment. No one does anxiety shtick better than Alan Arkin, and this role, although it's brief, allows him to trot out his full arsenal of nervous-guy effects. The scene builds to a wonderful punch line: the floundering doctor sends his patient off to the reunion with the desperate, inane advice "Don't kill anybody for a couple of days."

That's the high point of the picture, and it generates just about enough good will to keep us going through the remaining hour or so. Gradually, the film's poker-faced manner begins to lose its novelty. The killer's casual, businesslike attitude toward his work is too thin a joke to sustain a feature-length movie, but "Grosse Pointe Blank" repeats it over and over, as if the filmmakers couldn't imagine that we might tire of it. The picture stalls, and then starts to coast downhill, apparently unaware that the motor has stopped running. "Grosse Pointe Blank" isn't awful, but it isn't nearly as clever as it thinks it is, either. A black comedy like this shouldn't be so self-satisfied: you can't shock an audience into laughter unless you're willing to shock yourself a little, too. ♦

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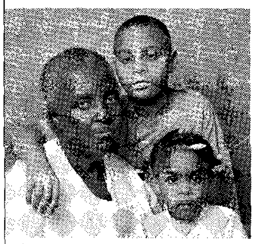

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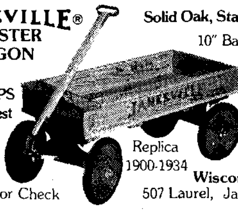

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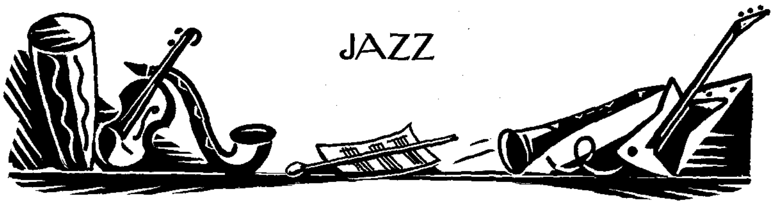


THE GETZ GANG

A sax man's such sweet thunder.

BY WHITNEY BALLIETT

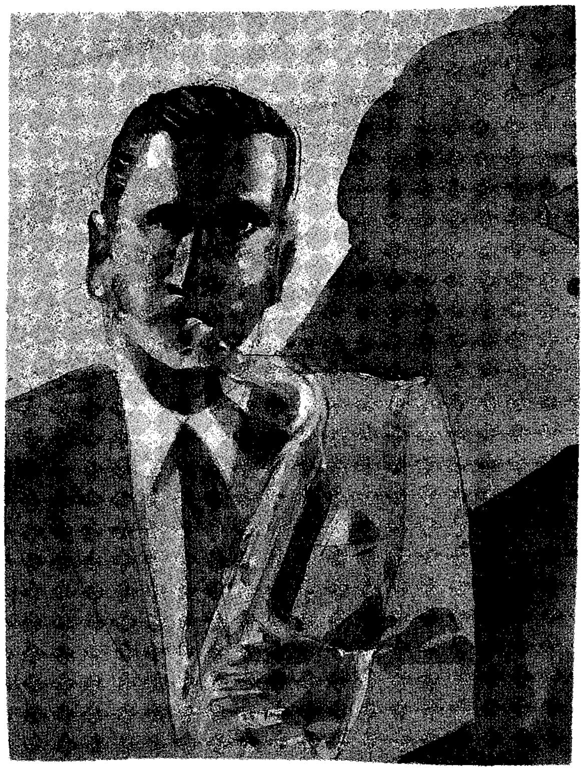
WHAT a monstrous angel the tenor saxophonist Stan Getz was! Born in 1927, of Russian Jewish stock, he was driven by the extraordinary lyrical heat that marked so many of the Russian Jewish musicians who graced jazz in the thirties and forties. He became a professional when he was fifteen, and a year later he joined the insuperable trombonist Jack Teagarden, who taught him, among other things, to drink. By the time he was seventeen, he was an alcoholic, and not long afterward he started using heroin. (He did not conquer his addictions until he was nearly sixty.) He passed through the bands of Stan Kenton, Jimmy Dorsey, and Benny Goodman, the last of whom fired him for missing shows while he ran around New York trying to score. He married for the first time in 1946 and again in 1956, and he is known to have had more than five children. He went with Woody Herman's brilliant Second Herd in 1947, and became one of the famous Four Brothers, a saxophone section whose other members would include Zoot Sims, Al Cohn, and Serge Chaloff. (It has been estimated that roughly half of this Herman band was strung out.) Late in 1948, he recorded his short, uncannily beautiful solo on Ralph Burns's "Early Autumn" for Herman, and when the record was released he became an instant star. He left Herman in 1950, and for the next forty years he led innumerable small groups, all of them made up of first-rate, often unknown musicians.

Getz died in 1991, and his fame has been steadily diminishing. Reissues, along with recordings never before released, continue to appear, though, and there is a full-length biography, "Stan Getz: A Life in Jazz," by Donald L. Maggin (Morrow; $25). The book is both a hagiography and a litany of the endless woes that beset Getz: his alcoholism and his drug addiction, which caused him to land in jail for six months in 1954; his troubles with the I.R.S.; his painful inarticulateness; his two attempted suicides; his corrosive legal troubles with his second wife; his physical abusiveness; his massive ego; and his easy lasciviousness. There were many Getzes, and their schizoid tendencies prompted Zoot Sims's sly and famous mot "Stan is a nice bunch of guys." Maggin is a fan; in buddy-buddy fashion, he refers to Getz as "Stan" throughout the book, and he writes of his playing, "He added to his gift for melody a wide range of sounds—whispers, cries, shouts, purrs, wails. And he always projected his notes with a personal timbre, a poignant ache that penetrated to the listener's marrow." Such statements celebrate but don't explain the mysteries of Getz's unique and embracing style.

He was the most persuasive of the throng of white tenor saxophonists who were influenced by Lester Young in the forties. (A strange turnaround: Young claimed that he had listened in his early days mainly to white saxophonists like Bud Freeman, Frank Trumbauer, and Jimmy Dorsey.) But eventually the glistening castles of sound that Getz built on Young's style had little to do with the no-nonsense, down-to-earth Young; these sounds were, in fact, startlingly new in jazz. Getz became the music's first romantic; he became an idol, a kind of Liszt or Elvis Presley. The idolatry that surrounded him grew out of his dulcet, swooning ballads and his beseeching, let-me-in tone. (Of help, too, were his all-American, square-faced handsomeness, his electric-blue eyes, his compact build—he was a terrific swimmer—and his sharp clothes.) When he played a nearly tempoless version of

"Thanks for the Memory," or "Summertime," or Jerome Kern's "Yesterdays," sighs arose, both from the music and from his listeners.

In time, Getz's style became closer to the playing of Young's stylistic opposites—the master saxophonists Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, and Johnny Hodges, all of whom had been setting down hymnlike ballads since the thirties. But there was a fundamental difference—an almost black-white thing—between these men and Getz. The older men were grounded in the blues; blue notes and blues figurations formed a subtle underpinning to everything they played. They had paid their dues, as jazz musicians say, and they no longer needed to spell out in their solos what they had been through as black men and black musicians. Getz, on the other hand, was not a striking blues player, and his style was highly personal. It recalled the playing, in the fifties and sixties, of his friend and admirer Miles Davis. (The two men, in age less than a year apart, died within months and miles of each other, in California.) There was a self-pitying edge, an oh-me-oh-my sound in Getz and Davis, and one wonders whether their dependence on drugs caused this plaintiveness, or whether they used their music to air their various neuroses and private woes. Getz's singular tone grew partly out of the skewed emotional freight he carried with him most of his life and partly out of the fact that he had started on the alto saxophone. Although he soon switched to the tenor, he never mastered its full tonal possibilities. (Consider Hawkins and Webster.) In almost every solo, he would shoot into his upper register, and the sorrowing sounds would take over. These ascents gave his playing a feminine quality, and suggested that he was an alto saxophonist trapped inside a tenor saxophonist.



Stan Getz's plaintive virtuosity camouflaged a personal life scarred by heroin, promiscuity, and attempted suicide.

GETZ was a superb musician. (He once said that the perfect tenor saxophonist would have "my technique, Al Cohn's ideas, and Zoot's time.") A lightning reader, he was never fazed, as many jazz musicians are, by new material. He had a photographic musical memory; once he had mastered a Woody Herman arrangement, he apparently never needed to look at it again. He was equally at ease in very fast tempos (an area that turns many otherwise excellent jazz musicians into automatons), in rocking middle speeds, and in ad-lib ballads. He could play straight melody without being florid or freezing (a failing of many post-Charlie Parker musicians), and he was a consummate melodic improviser, a maker of instant new melody. He relished challenges. In 1961, he commissioned the arranger and composer Eddie Sauter to write a piece for him, a springboard for his improvisation, and the result, called "Focus," was a seven-part, thirty-five-minute composition for small string orchestra. The longest part is slightly over six minutes, and the music in general floats back and forth between Hollywood and Bartók. Getz was shown the music and in one day recorded his often ingenious variations, the strings pumping away behind him. He considered "Focus" the best album he ever recorded, and he was right. (It is still available, on a Verve CD.)

Maggin has put together a Getz CD on Verve ("Stan Getz: A Musical Biography") to accompany his book, and it contains eleven selections, made between 1952 and 1991. It starts with "Night Rider," which is taken from "Focus," and is played in a kind of mock fast tempo, full of staccato, splintering Getz figures. "Corcovado" ("Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars"), done in 1963, with João and Astrud Gilberto, helped to start the bossa-nova craze of the mid-sixties. (For a time, it made Getz a rich man.) Getz was an impeccable obbligato player, and he wraps sinuous supporting figures around Ella Fitzgerald in "You're Blasé" and around Abbey Lincoln in "I'm in Love." "Summertime" was set down in 1964, with the vibraphonist Gary Burton, and "Night and Day" in 1991, as a duet with the pianist Kenny Barron. The first is serene and melancholy, but the second, made at a concert in Copenhagen, sounds strained and mechanical, although it never falls below the high level that Getz invariably maintained. The prize on Maggin's CD is another duet, this one backed by a rhythm section, between Getz and the witty, always surprising valve trombonist Bob Brookmeyer. The tune, "Who Could Care?," is Brookmeyer's, and the two dodge and weave and dance around each other, then back each other, insistent shadows.

The newest previously unreleased Getz CD, "Stan Getz: Yours and Mine" (Concord), was recorded at a concert in Glasgow two years before he died. Four of the seven numbers are ballads, and they are full of spaces and unaccustomed low notes, which give the impression that Getz was at last sinking into the proper sounds of the tenor saxophone. The three others are medium- and up-tempo numbers, and again make it clear that he could do anything with rhythm.

THE sweet, nagging beauty of Getz's ballad playing has gone largely out of fashion, and out of jazz. This is particularly noticeable in the playing of the young saxophonists now pouring out of the woodwork. John Coltrane's influence—the guttural tone, the screams, the animal noises—remains pervasive. These saxophonists should listen to Getz. He may have worn his troubled Jewish heart on his sleeve, but, at his best, he could play rings around God. ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

THIS JUST IN FROM OUR CULT DESK

BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

Paris—Pierre Salinger announced that he has "clear photographic evidence" that "something" was following Comet Hale-Bopp, as the Heaven's Gate cultists claimed. The former newsman, who says he was given the blurry photograph "by a guy in Montana," asserts that the object was either the alien spacecraft sent to rescue the cultists or a missile of the type that brought down T.W.A. Flight 800 last summer.

He explained that the military might have mistaken the comet for a civilian airliner full of vacationing Americans and tried to shoot it down.

New Cretin, Ind.—Eighty members of a religious group were killed yesterday when their homemade spaceship blew up while they were fuelling it with methane produced naturally by hogs on their farm.

The explosion, which was felt twenty-five miles away, occurred when a curious passing motorist stopped to observe the brightly painted fifteen-story-high craft and lit a cigarette.

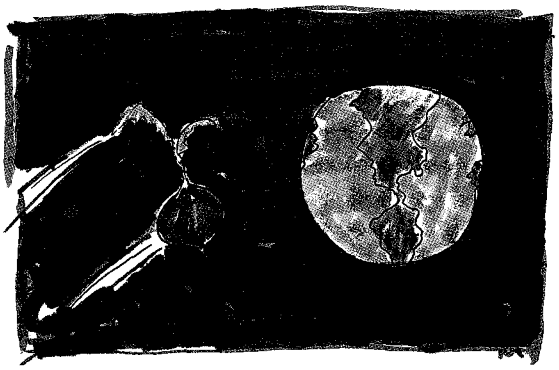
The cult believes that the Biblical book of Ezekiel contains coded instructions on how to build a gigantic space ark in the shape of a zucchini and powered by pig emissions.

The motorist, shaken, was later released from the hospital.

Cape Canaveral—Heavily armed members of a cult that believes the earth is on a collision course with a rogue space radish the size of Kansas hijacked the crew of the space shuttle Atlantis early this morning and demanded that they be flown to the Planet Altoid.

The group's leader, who calls himself Argon, said that he would release the shuttle's cargo of pregnant fruit flies—which were on board as part of a scientific experiment—as a "good-will gesture."

A source at the Hayden Planetarium said he was unaware of the existence of a Planet Altoid.



Wawaii, Hawaii—The religious cult leader who urged his eighty-four followers to leap into an active volcano told authorities that he had been planning to jump in himself but remembered at the last minute that he had forgotten to pick up his dry cleaning.

Frederick Lugoff, sixty-four, known as Frodo to members of his New Vesuvians cult, was apprehended by park rangers who became suspicious after they saw dozens of people wrapped in tin-foil holding their noses and jumping into the crater.

The group believed in purification by immersion in molten lava.

Lugoff's lawyer said his client had been depressed recently at not being able to attract new members.

Carma Costa, Calif.—A sect of radical Buddhists who believe that Vice-President Al Gore is the reincarnation of their twelfth-century founder, Chogram Nannandaparma Pish, set fire to themselves at a downtown shopping mall today to protest what they called "blasphemous articles in the press about the Supreme Teacher's recent fund-raising activities and toastings in Beijing."

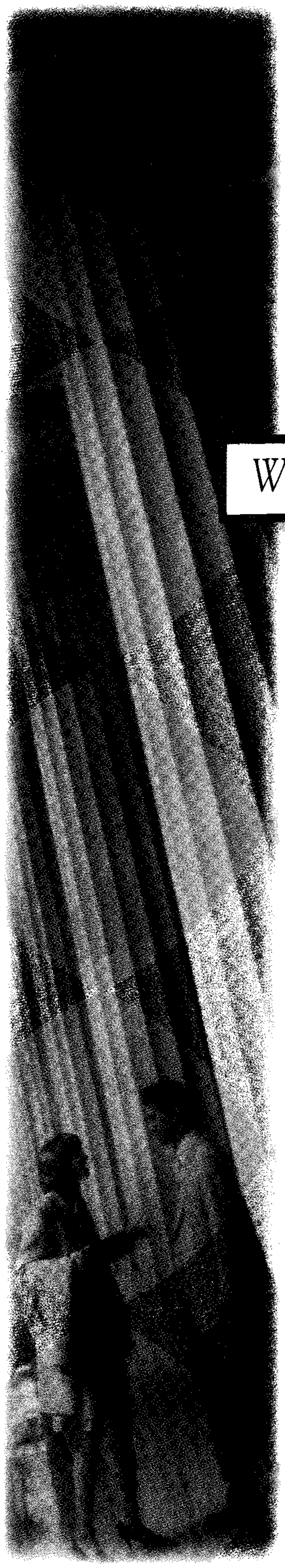
Gore, on being asked about the Bodhisattva Day Massacre during a fund-raiser at the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, said he had "no controlling divine authority" over the group.

Cape Canaveral—Declaring himself impatient with the lack of progress in the sixty-seven-day-old space-shuttle hostage crisis, Cult Commander Argon sent E-mail to reporters today saying that he would start "tossing out stiff nematode corpses" if the cult's demands were not met. Nematodes are among the specimens aboard the shuttle for scientific study.

He and the other astro-terrorists were now willing, Argon said, to drop their demand to be flown to the Planet Altoid. They were now prepared to settle for "any planet in the Tapioca-14 Galaxy with a surface temperature under two thousand degrees Celsius."

Inagaddadavida, Calif.—Over half the forty-eight members of the 2000 Club millennial cult who committed suicide last week by eating live gila monsters and washing them down with peach schnapps had already had their brains surgically removed, according to the Belvedere County Medical Examiner.

"It's a fairly rare procedure," he said, "but these folks seemed to know what they were doing." ♦



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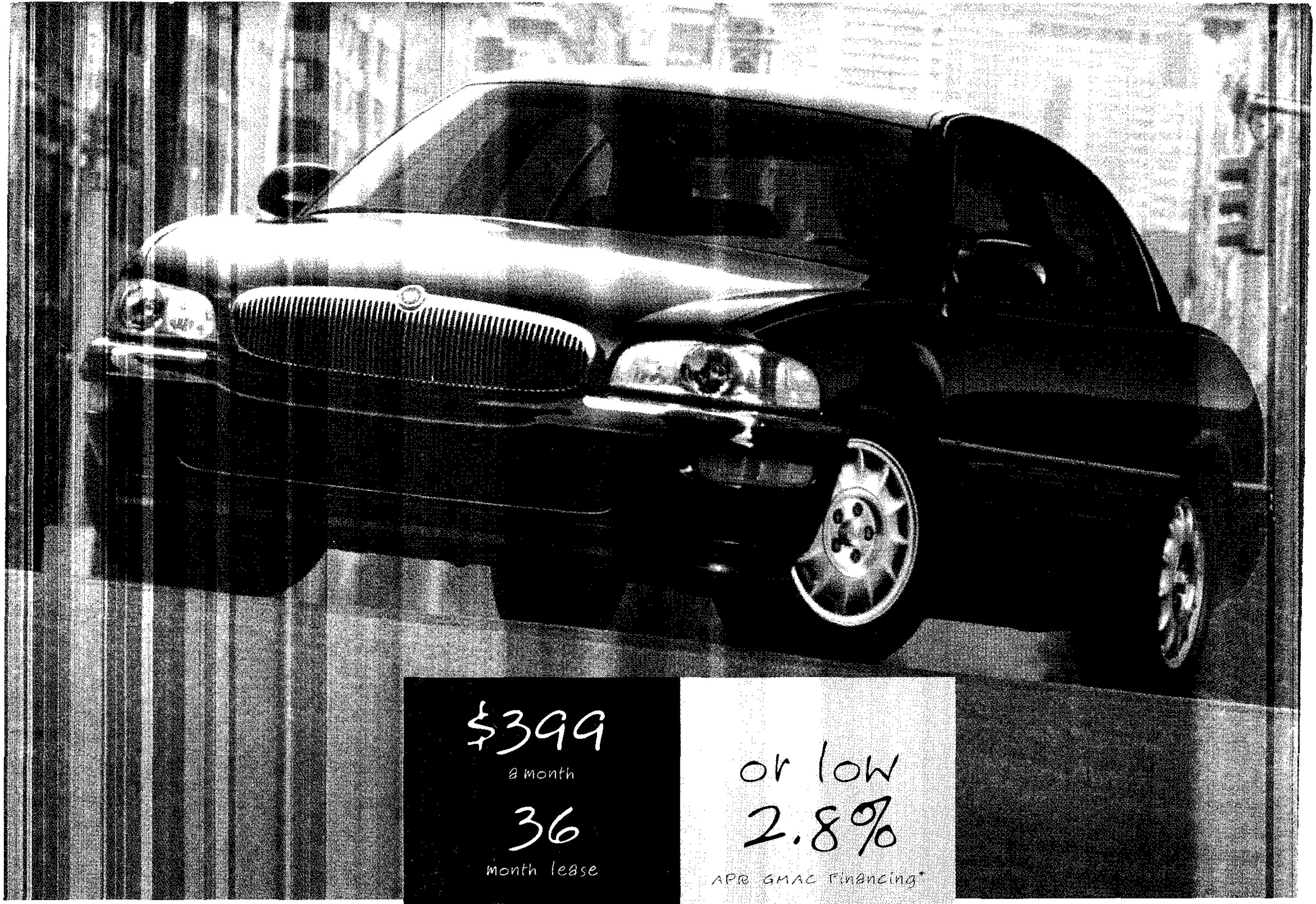

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GM ® *Length of contract is limited. Other finance rates available as length of contract increases. Dealer financial participation may affect consumer cost. You must take retail delivery from dealer stock March 12, 1997 through June 30, 1997. See your participating dealer for qualification details.

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